The Geography Of Bliss Book Summary, by Eric Weiner

by Allen Cheng


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1-Page Summary of The Geography Of Bliss

Overview

There are people who are happy and those who aren't. There's a lot of factors that contribute to happiness, but it might not be what you think. Some countries focus too much on making their citizens happy, but they end up failing miserably at it. It's hard to say what makes a country truly happy, but there is some trends that make us believe that buying stuff won't lead you to happiness.

The founders of the United States believed that people should be able to pursue happiness. However, other countries are doing a better job at keeping their citizens happy and content with life.

But what can a country do to make its people happy? Should it eliminate taxes, offer free education and healthcare or perhaps increase the minimum wage? We'll look at these possibilities as well as other tactics that have been used in countries with low happiness ratings.

In this article, you'll learn about:

1. The country that keeps track of its Gross National Happiness (GNH).
2. How a good artistic and cultural scene is more important than wealth in a country's development.
3. Which Eastern European country ranks dead last in happiness.
Big Idea #1: The Netherlands has a lot to do with happiness research, and it's one of the happiest countries in the world.

It may seem strange to study happiness. Is it even possible to measure something so subjective and elusive?

If you're interested in the latest research on happiness, it's best to start with the Netherlands. Researchers there hold annual conferences where they can compare their findings.

The Netherlands has become a place where happiness is studied and practiced. The Dutch professor Ruut Veenhoven has been influential in the development of this movement, with his publication Journal of Happiness Studies being highly regarded by many peers.

There's a database that contains statistics and research results from around the world. When you put all of this information together, it provides valuable insight.

For example, the database shows that married people are happier than single ones. Democrats are less happy than Republicans, and rich people are happier than poor ones. However, some of the data is contradictory: in many countries where suicide rates are higher than average, happiness levels are high too. Also, religious people tend to be happier than nonreligious ones but secular countries have a high level of happiness too.

It is no surprise that the database is kept in the Netherlands, since many studies and articles show that they are among the happiest people. Why? Possible reasons include being a democratic European nation with a well-functioning welfare system; tolerance could be another reason for their happiness because of their tolerant attitude toward drugs, prostitution and immigration.

But how can one measure happiness?

There are many methods to determine happiness, but some of them are not very reliable. However, asking people how happy they are is a surprisingly accurate way to measure it.

Big Idea #2: The Swiss are happy because they avoid class conflicts, enjoy nature and have a precision-based work ethic.

Switzerland is also a very happy country.

You might think of Switzerland as a rather quiet place. The reputation for Swiss precision is one of the only reputations that can make Germans look lazy, and it's often associated with punctuality.

Switzerland is known for its precision. Everything runs like clockwork there, with trains arriving and departing on time, roads free of potholes and clean bathrooms everywhere you look. They have mastered the art of keeping things clean without causing any unhappiness. The Swiss are wealthy, but they avoid class divisions by avoiding discussions about money altogether. They know that it's impossible to talk about wealth without triggering envy which is a huge source of unhappiness in society.
Swiss people avoid flaunting their wealth, which is the exact opposite of Americans. They also have a very liberal euthanasia law, so they can always rest peacefully in case things go wrong.

In addition, Switzerland is a good example of how nature can be an important source of happiness. The Swiss Alps are beautiful and have contributed to the happiness of the Swiss people for centuries. In fact, this relationship has been described in words by E. O Wilson who said that our enjoyment of nature's beauty is a powerful genetic trait. Others have noted how nature affects us physiologically as well; Roger Ulrich studied patients recovering from gallbladder surgery and found that those with views of nature healed faster than those without such views.

**Big Idea #3: Bhutan has a policy that shapes its happiness. Spirituality and Buddhism contribute to the country's happiness.**

Bhutan is a small country located in the Himalayas. It's between India and China, two big countries that are different from Bhutan. If you're looking for a place to live like a monk and devote your time to meditation, this is it! Bhutan has policies that don't match American values because they focus on Gross National Happiness instead of economic growth.

Many capitalist nations pursue money as an end unto itself. However, Bhutan is different in that it doesn't value money so highly.

Until 1962, Bhutan didn't have a single paved road. It also lacked schools and hospitals. Nearby Nepal looks to tourism as a way to make money, but the King of Bhutan sees overall happiness as much more valuable than wealth. As a result, he has made sure his people get free education and health care. The nation also outlaws smoking.

Buddhism is one of the main factors contributing to Bhutan's happiness. It helps them see beauty in every aspect of life, especially nature. The World Database of Happiness also reveals that spirituality increases happiness and it definitely applies in Bhutan because people who believe in reincarnation are happy when they meet their previous lives' relatives.

It's also important to recognize the Bhutanese perspective on life. They don't stress about their achievements or failures because they realize that one person can only do so much in a lifetime, and therefore it doesn't make sense to worry about what you're doing right now.

**Big Idea #4: Qatar is rich, but it's a barren desert and doesn't have much culture. Therefore, there isn't much happiness in Qatar.**

Next, we'll visit Qatar. It's a country with little water and natural resources. However, it has been able to create the ultimate welfare state by making its oil wealth available for free to everyone in the country. The government also provides each man with $7,000 per month when he gets married and gives him a plot of land as well.

Despite Qatar's efforts to make life easier for its citizens, they still complain a lot. The country's wealthy are upset about the government not doing enough for them and if there is talk of creating new taxes, it
always meets stern disapproval. Wealth has been difficult for Qatari as lottery winners who grow saddened by their loss of friends and lifestyle change that comes with so much money. They find shopping less special than before because most don't have jobs and instead rely on family members to give them an allowance. Furthermore, since there isn't much culture in Doha or other cities like it, art is hardly valued at all. Most disturbing though is that Qatari people can't be happy no matter what happens because happiness comes from God and humans can do nothing about it according to the Qatari perspective.

The most important lesson we can take from Qatar is that happiness cannot exist without some discomfort to compare it with.

**Big Idea #5: Iceland is a beautiful country with a rich culture and lots of happiness.**

When you think of happiness, what kind of landscape comes to mind? Is it a sunny blue sky or a grassy meadow?

Iceland is a small country on the edge of Europe, but it's known for being one of the happiest countries in the world. This may seem odd given Iceland's long, dark winters and short summers, but there are plenty of creative people who work hard to keep themselves busy during those long months. Poets and painters can be found everywhere in Reykjavík; they're even common among taxi drivers and fishermen. It's no wonder that Icelanders write so much—it keeps them occupied when winter comes around.

Iceland has an impressive landscape, thanks to its dramatic geysers, hot springs, glaciers and volcanic rock. This is why it's the perfect place for people to come up with ideas of elves and dwarves.

Iceland has a culture that encourages people to work in the arts. It's because they embrace failure and naiveté when it comes to those who want to create art. They encourage their citizens, instead of discouraging them, by saying "Go ahead and try!"

Icelanders are proud of their art, even though a lot of it is bad. They think that if they make something with good intentions, then it doesn't matter whether or not people like the end result. The important thing is to try again tomorrow and do better next time.

**Big Idea #6: Moldova is the unhappiest place on Earth.**

If Iceland is such a happy place, it would make sense that the opposite of happiness would be a hot and oppressive country. Perhaps somewhere in Africa? No, not there. According to Veenhoven's World Database of Happiness, Moldova is the world's unhappiest place.

Moldovans are unhappy because of economics.

In Moldova, there's a problem of unhappiness due to the lack of money. There is data that supports this claim.

Moldova isn't the poorest nation. It's surrounded by wealthier countries, like Nigeria and Bangladesh,
which have it worse off. However, Moldova is still poor when compared to its neighbors.

Moldova's corruption is one of the worst in Europe, where even professors are bribed by students. People avoid young doctors because they're more likely to have bought their degrees.

Moldova is particularly poor in natural resources. They have no oil or minerals to trade and cannot use them because they are small in size. Their only source of revenue comes from a limited range of fruit and vegetables that they grow.

Like Qatar, Moldova does not have a strong culture. This is likely because the country has never had a national identity and was only created after the fall of the Soviet Union. Romania and Russia both claim to be its parent country, which adds to its confusion about who it is as a nation. It makes sense that Moldovans are pessimistic about their future since they don't know where they're going or what's in store for them, besides envy of other countries' accomplishments and resignation to their own situation.

Big Idea #7: The Thai people are happy and don't take life too seriously.

No discussion of the happiest countries in the world would be complete without a look at Thailand, which is known as "the Land of Smiles." The country has many different kinds of smiles. For example, there's "yim cheun chom," which expresses admiration and "yim thak thaan," which means to go ahead with an idea that you don't like. It also includes "yim sao," or a sad smile.

The Thais are so familiar with the many reasons to smile because they've found their own secret to happiness. They're not thinking about being happy, and it's working for them.

In Thailand, two common phrases are "Don't think too much," and "Don't be so serious." In Thai society, ignorance really is bliss. Thinking only leads to problems, not happiness.

Thai people aren't the only ones who think that way. Psychologists Tim Wilson and Jonathan Schooler conducted a study in which they found that listening to classical music after thinking about their happiness levels made people happier than those who didn't think about it.

Thailand is a happy country because they treat everything as if it's not serious. They joke around and laugh at work, which makes them happier. Also, their motto might be "when nothing matters, life is easy."

Big Idea #8: Some people have tried to find out what makes people happy, but it's not considered as important as other qualities.

There's a good chance you've experienced laughter that spreads to others. But can happiness spread as well? A group of TV producers were curious about this question and applied it to the town of Slough, located outside London in England.

In 2005, the BBC aired a reality television series called Make Slough Happy. The goal of this show was to see if happiness could be spread around town by having 6 experts train 50 people in positive thinking
and then have them go out and influence others.

Volunteers would hold hands, hug trees, do yoga and tai chi and dance in the aisles of supermarkets. They’d also laugh uncontrollably.

The 50 volunteers were asked to rate their happiness on a scale of 1-10. They did this before and after the experiment. The results showed that Slough's happiness rating increased by 33% from the beginning to the end of the experiment, but it is hard to say whether or not these results will last. It should be noted that British people have a different attitude toward happiness than Americans do. Unlike in America, where life is considered an opportunity for personal fulfillment and achievement, British people see life as something one must endure with some determination and dignity.

Imagine you're on a plane, and the engine bursts into flames. Would you rather have a happy pilot who just graduated from pilot school or an experienced one with 10 years of flying experience?

The British don't believe that a happy life is the most important thing.

**Big Idea #9: India is a country where happiness is big business. However, there's still some wisdom in it that we can learn from.**

India is famous for its spiritual gurus, and it attracts thousands of tourists every year. Many of these travellers are people who want to escape their work-filled lives and find a simpler way of living.

When the author went to India, he went to hear Sri Sri Ravi Shankar speak about eternal bliss. However, he found that his words lacked meaning and substance. He also noticed that many people in the audience were eating popcorn. The author believes that this is because they are looking for a snack rather than something substantial.

For example, when asked about what happens after death, Shankar’s cheeky reply was that he could provide answers but doesn’t want to ruin the suspense. He also said that India’s most popular Gurus are treated like pop stars and even get sponsored by big corporations. However, while Shankar may lack in philosophical depth, his overall message is clear and positive: happiness shouldn't be anyone's main goal in life, and love will always trump happiness. This isn’t a controversial message in India because Hinduism regards the pursuit of happiness as an act of self-defeat.

According to Hinduism, it's pointless to try and be happy since unhappiness is a result of fate and karma. It's basically like defying the gods, so people believe that happiness can't be measured. The author believes this approach is wrong because he thinks scientists should determine whether or not happiness can be measured.

**Big Idea #10: According to a recent study, the United States has been getting less happy as it has grown wealthier.**

The United States ranks high in terms of economics and spending, but it doesn't rank as high on the happiness scale.
Adrian White is a researcher from the University of Leicester in England. He ranks the United States as twenty-third happiest country in the world, below Costa Rica, Malta and Malaysia. In fact, Americans have not been able to match their levels of wealth with happiness levels since 1950. Happiness has declined steadily over time.

According to psychologist David Myers, Americans are at their lowest level of happiness ever. Depression and other mental health problems have increased, divorce rates have doubled and violent crime rates quadrupled. Teen suicide is also on the rise.

One reason for this might be expectation. With more money, people expect to experience more happiness. But as the wealth increases, it becomes harder and harder to reach those levels of happiness. So, as everyone buys luxury items in hopes of increasing their emotional well-being, they soon find out that such purchases do not increase their level of happiness at all. Instead, there's confusion and disappointment when these expectations aren't met.

Americans spend more time at work and less time with friends and family than people in other countries. They also have longer commutes to work, which is related to unhappiness.

The United States is also a traditionally restless nation, with people who are never satisfied with what they have and are always striving for more. There's nothing wrong with that, but when you're never happy with what you have, it will be impossible to find happiness.

Although Americans are not happy now, they still believe happiness is in their future.

**Full Summary of The Geography Of Bliss**

**Overall Summary**

Eric Weiner travels the world in search of happiness. He visits a man named Ruut Veenhofen who studies what makes people happy. The author then creates an atlas of happy places to visit and smokes hashish while in the Netherlands.

In Switzerland, Weiner travels by train. The clean country has happy residents who don't have much to be unhappy about. However, they're limited in their range of emotions and can only feel a few things at once. He spends some time eating chocolate, which is better than any other food he's had before. Next he flies to Bhutan, an isolated Buddhist country with different customs from the rest of the world. There are healers and temples there that make him feel more peaceful than anywhere else in the world.

Weiner then travels to Qatar. The recently-wealthy Muslim country has a tribe ruled by an emir. Members of the tribe receive large amounts of money, instead of paying taxes. Foreigners do the work. Despite the money, Qataris do not seem very happy because they are not allowed to drink alcohol or go out in public without wearing their traditional clothing (the men wear white robes and headgear). Some people say that Muslim faith produces happiness; others disagree with this view.

Weiner goes to Iceland after Qatar. The country is cold, but the people are happy because they trust each
other and share a common culture. This produces happiness rather than wealth.

In Moldova, the people are unhappy. They don't have any money, but they still aren't happy. Weiner then goes to Thailand where people seem happier than in America. A coup takes place while he's there and he leaves for England where a television show attempts to increase happiness among residents of Slough (a town known for being miserable). He interviews some of those residents about their experiences on the show.

In India, Weiner explored an ashram and interviewed many people. He found sadness as well as happiness in the country of contradictions.

Weiner moved to Miami. However, he didn't like the city and many of his friends left as well.

**Introduction**

In the beginning, Weiner talks about how he and his friend tried to travel as 5-year-olds. He then goes on to say that after college, he became a journalist in order to travel. He also says that he visited many countries while working for National Public Radio (NPR), which was partly why he decided to become a journalist.

In the beginning of his book, he says that most people have been unhappy throughout history. However, in recent times there has been an expectation of happiness among people.

Weiner argues that happiness comes from within, but it's also affected by the environment. He says we should not think of happiness as a place to go, but rather as a state of mind or an attitude to have.

Since the beginning of time, people have dreamed about a perfect place. The author studies happiness and prepares for his trip by reading travel guides. He travels to many places, but doesn't really expect to find happiness anywhere.

**Chapter 1: “The Netherlands—Happiness Is a Number”**

Weiner's article explains that people like to watch other people having fun. As such, they enjoy going to cafes and watching pornography. He visits a café in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. It is a contrast of strict anti-Muslim policies and tolerance for sex and drugs.

Weiner meets a Dutch researcher who studies happiness. He runs the World Database of Happiness, which includes locations and things that make people happy. The database was started in the 1960s by Veenhofen, who instead of aspiring for an ideal social system as his friends did, tried to study positive results. Today there are numerous researchers like him studying positive social sciences.

The author writes that philosophy and religion also represent a search for happiness. Nowadays, science offers more information about how to achieve it. To measure subjective well-being, or SWB, researchers look at the brain using MRI scans. Positive feelings activate a more recent part of the brain. Scientists also measure stress hormones, cardiac rhythms, and facial expressions as well as conducting surveys and
interviews with people in different cultures around the world.

People feel happier if they find a dime than if they don't. They also appear to be happier in person. This makes it more difficult to measure happiness, because people's feelings vary from moment to moment and day-to-day. Weiner asks how we can become happy, based on the studies that have been done about happiness so far, which show that some people are naturally happier than others and that certain activities make them even happier.

In the database room, Weiner describes his findings. Outgoing and committed people tend to be happier than melancholy and idle people. Scientists struggle to figure out whether happiness causes or results from these behaviors. Different cultures have their own takes on happiness. In East Asia, communal betterment is more important than personal betterment, so those people are less happy. However in America where personal betterment is more at the forefront of society, Americans tend to exaggerate their happiness when they're asked how happy they are because it's a cultural thing for them to do that as well as being influenced by advertising companies who want them to buy products based on making them happy (such as vacations).

Veenhofen allows Weiner to review the complete database. It's clear that countries like Iceland and Denmark are happier than others. Countries with large income gaps can be just as happy or even happier than more egalitarian countries, such as those in Scandinavia. The United States is not a particularly happy place due to its overall wealth inequality and lack of social programs for poor people. African nations are often unhappy because they're so impoverished, while former Soviet republics have high levels of unhappiness despite their relative affluence. Democracies don't necessarily make people any happier than dictatorships do; Russia is an example of this trend. Tropical nations tend to be average in terms of happiness, but cold ones may actually be slightly happier on average—Scandinavia again being an exception.

Most countries report that they are happy, although a few do not. The problem is the media and philosophers exaggerate problems.

The Dutch are very happy. They have a tolerant society, and they allow drugs, prostitution, etc. Weiner spends some time at a coffee shop smoking hashish.

A research paper by Veenhofen has shown that people who consume very small or large amounts of stimulants report less happiness than moderate consumers. Permissive approaches to sex have also been linked to greater levels of happiness. Weiner, however, points out that the author is more interested in researching pleasure and happiness than he is in actually achieving it.

**Chapter 2: “Switzerland—Happiness Is Boredom”**

The author next visits Switzerland. The country is wealthy and clean, but the people lack outward signs of happiness. Weiner goes to a café with someone from New York. Swiss residents cite cleanliness and trains running on time as causes for their happiness. Also, they don't stand out from each other, which can provoke envy and unhappiness in others.
In the book, "The Geography of Bliss", author Eric Weiner travels to Switzerland and discovers that the Swiss have a narrow band of emotions. The Swiss don't have a sense of humor, but they enjoy outdoor activities such as hiking in the Alps. He also learns that people are happier when they're connected to their place of origin. For example, he goes on trains throughout Switzerland and notes how polite people are despite their wealth. Additionally, chocolate is one way that makes people happy because it contains chemicals like tryptophan and anandamide which can affect emotion.

Choice is important, but too much choice can be overwhelming. The Swiss are known for their voting rights and frequent elections, which have been shown to make them happy. However, it's a happiness that doesn't go beyond being content.

**Chapter 3: “Bhutan—Happiness Is a Policy”**

The author flies to Bhutan, thinking of Shangri-La from the book Lost Horizon. The Buddhist country measures people's happiness as other countries measure wealth. It has low crime and high happiness.

Weiner landed in Paro. A guide named Tashi met him and drove him to a café. Later, they went to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan.

Bhutan did not have television until 1999. Since then, wrestling shows have become popular, but are also controversial. Until 1962, the country did not have a road, school or hospital and it didn't even use money for 30 years before that. Recently, they've introduced internet cafes and cell phones to their capital city of Thimphu which still does not have a traffic light.

Weiner meets Karma Ura, who runs a think tank. He says that most countries measure wealth and longevity instead of happiness. Instead of achievement, he cares about compassion.

Weiner describes a visit to the doctor before going on his trip. The doctor said he was fine, but Weiner knew that wasn't true because he had been experiencing panic attacks. He went back to see Ura and told him about it, who suggested that westerners are more distant from death than Tibetan people because of their belief in reincarnation. Later, Weiner met Tulku Barba, who studied with the Dalai Lama for many years. He mentioned Drukpa Kunley, or "The Divine Madman," a famous monk throughout Tibet who lived by himself on an island in a lake for several years without any shelter whatsoever.

Linda Leaming, an American who lives in Bhutan, meets Anthony Weiner. She notes how the isolated geography of Bhutan defines it. The remoteness from other countries calms people and reminds them to be happy about being alive because they could die at any time. In addition, she says that men sometimes spend three years meditating without talking or looking into each others' eyes as a way of remembering happiness.

Weiner visits Tulku again. In Bhutan, most people are happy but no one talks about it. In America, few people are happy and everyone talks about happiness constantly.

Gross Domestic Product measures the economic worth of a country. After approximately $15,000 per year, money does make people happier. King Wangchuk of Bhutan developed the concept of Gross
National Happiness in 1973 to shift the traditional economic viewpoint that more money equals more happiness. The notion is sincere and has been proven by scientific research.

Weiner meets with Tulku again. He attends to a previous matter, seeking favor for a court ruling, and then he turns to Weiner for healing.

Weiner and Tashi drive to Bumthang, an eastern province. They see houses with phallic symbols painted on them. The purpose of the paintings is to ward off evil spirits. In America, we have separate settings for different aspects of life so that people don't have to negotiate or compromise when they are in their cars, beds etc., but hard farm work requires compromise.

Weiner visits a village where Ura came from. The mother of the girl says that life is better now than it was before, but she criticizes television and democracy.

In Thimphu, Weiner visits Ura. They discuss the differences between Bhutanese and American people. Both groups have irrational beliefs; however, happiness is in relationships rather than money which can improve relationships but does not bring happiness by itself. Trust is important for building good relationships, whereas money alone cannot foster trust or bring about happiness.

The two friends drink beer and talk about their lives. Tashi admits that he is annoyed by German tourists, but also worries about himself and his country. He gives Weiner a large wooden penis as a gift.

After driving to the airport, Weiner feels calm. Bhutan, with its unique culture and traditions, allows him to have a better understanding of happiness.

**Chapter 4: “Qatar—Happiness Is a Winning Lottery Ticket”**

In 2001, a sheikh purchased over one billion dollars of art from European galleries. The Qatari royal showed that his country had large amounts of money. The author took interest in this purchase because he thought that maybe money can buy happiness and flew to Qatar. Upon arriving at the airport, he found out that all people who were flying first class were Qataris and not other citizens like him. He was put into business class instead but still did not meet any Qataris in the airport before boarding the plane for their flight to Doha, which is where they would spend most of their time there while on vacation during this trip as well.

Weiner complains about the luxury hotel's extravagant services. He wonders, "Why am I not happy here? Why do I feel like there is something wrong with me?"

The hotel was a tomb, according to Weiner. He called Lisa in Qatar and discussed life there with her. Most people are servants of some kind or another, and they stay in air-conditioned areas to avoid the heat. It was too hot for Weiner at the fancy hotel, so he checked out early and went to a less expensive one where he enjoyed the swim-up bar.

Weiner compares Qatar to an airport terminal, where everything is air-conditioned and there are plenty of shopping options. Stephen Ulph contrasts the country with more historical Arab locations in his talk.
After several days in the country, Weiner still has not met any Qataris. At a mall, he meets Sami who may
know a Qatari. The Qatari tribe is an extended family of which each member is somehow related to
another member. Weiner argues that socializing increases happiness and money can isolate people from
other people and thereby make them less happy.

At the museum, Weiner and Lisa discuss her troubled past. She argues that Qatar lacks culture. The emir
pays for more museums to be built so he can attract tourists and show off his wealth. He also pays for
electricity, education, etcetera. Weiner says that the emir is both pro- and anti-American in that he's
friendly with America but funds terrorists at the same time (the Taliban). Sami arranges for Weiner to
meet some Qataris at Al Jazeera headquarters where they work on a state-funded news channel called Al
Jazeera. When asked if they are happy by Weiner, wealthy Qataris respond uncomfortably saying "yes" or
"we're as happy as we should be."

Weiner references a statistic that people who believe in God are happier. However, he also notes that
countries with less religious populations, such as Sweden and Denmark, have higher levels of happiness.
Therefore, it's not the belief itself but rather the content of belief or lack thereof that leads to happiness.

The lottery originated in Flanders, a region of the Netherlands. The first lottery happened there. Qatar is
like a lottery winner because it has an abundance of oil and gas money. Weiner compares that to being
lucky at winning the lottery. Psychologist Philip Brickman studied people who won lotteries and found
that they did not stay happy for long periods of time; they reverted to their previous levels of happiness
after some time had passed.

Lisa and Weiner meet at a hotel restaurant. Lisa says that she is unhappy in Qatar, but Weiner argues that
he's addicted to sadness. Scientists have discovered that wanting and liking happen in different parts of
the brain; people can want things they don't like. Weiner admits to an addiction to bags, which Lisa
doesn't understand because they are not useful or beautiful.

Weiner argues that there are two extremes of having too little or too much money. At a Starbucks, people
who have no work receive paychecks for their tribal connection. Scientists find that people who have
excess work are happier than those who don't have enough work. Materialistic people aren't as happy as
those without materialism. Weiner buys an expensive pen to replace his old one with a broken nib and ink
cartridge.

A female activist, Moza al-Malki, meets with a man named Weiner at a mall. She argues that money
increases happiness and he argues that social science and western philosophy show limits to the amount
of money one needs for true happiness.

Weiner meets Abdulaziz, a Qatari. Abdulaziz says that the oil boom in Qatar has made the country less
happy. Foreign workers outnumber Qataris, and they are treated poorly. The tribe determines outcomes
for people there. Money can buy basic dignity but not happiness. Abdulaziz asks Weiner about his
personal problems with ambition, which he also renounces after some thought on it.

Weiner leaves Qatar soon afterwards to go back home to New York City via Paris and London.
Chapter 5: “Iceland—Happiness Is Failure”

Weiner goes to Iceland. A local tells him that the sun won't rise that day. Happiness surveys show that people in colder countries are happier. Weiner sleeps during the day, and argues that the cold may make people band together, leading to happiness.

The author mentions that people drink a lot in Iceland. The reason for this is that there are not many things to do, and so they get bored of seeing each other. Magnus says that the small population leads to drinking on weekends (not during the week). He says it's because Icelanders like to meet new people at bars where they can chat with drunk women.

Weiner eats breakfast at his hotel. He mentions that food is expensive in Iceland, and scientists believe it's because of their lack of SAD.

The author likes Iceland because it is a small country with a genetically related population. They pursue policies that help them and their relatives, which increases happiness.

Bobby Fischer, an American chess player, made Iceland famous by winning a match here. He resided in Iceland until his death in 2008. People who live there don't like to eat ugly things such as lobsters and codfish but they do enjoy food and drinks that others find unappealing including shark meat and black death schnapps.

Iceland is a small country, and Reykjavik seems to be the only major city. The buildings are made of flimsy materials like wood and paper, which makes them seem temporary. There are many art galleries and music stores in this area that contribute to the happiness of Icelanders.

Icelanders are proud of their language, which they say is the same as Vikings spoke. Instead of borrowing foreign words to describe new things, like other languages do, Icelandic adds new words. For example, for television they created the word sjonvarp.

Some scientists argue that the parts of our brains for language are more recent, as are those for happiness. Icelandic has numerous positive phrases and poetry. The traditions of Iceland combine poetry with war. It's argued that aggressive language may reduce sadness.

Weiner argues that Iceland has more art than other countries because of the cold weather. He also suggests that the land's earthquakes and volcanoes may make people happier, which could be why Reykjavik is having a golden age.

Iceland has a fashion scene and people there admire failure. Icelanders don't envy each other, according to Larus Johannesson, who owns a music store and recording label. He says that he is happy because he's had numerous careers in his life. Psychologists have argued that people find happiness in the skills they think they have rather than what they actually have. Therefore, failing can lead to better results without undue harm.

Weiner says that he wanted to write for The New York Times at the age of 26, even though he had no
experience. However, after being interviewed by the newspaper, he was hired and his first piece ended up on the front page. After working there for a while longer, however, Weiner's position was terminated because they thought that he wasn't experienced enough.

Icelandic artists are different from other artists. They're more naïve in a positive sense, as opposed to being ignorant or inexperienced. Johannesson describes Icelandic folk stories and how Icelanders believe in ghosts. He then recommends that Weiner interviews Hilmar, an Icelandic Heathen.

In the year 1000, Iceland officially converted to Christianity from paganism. Hilmar leads a group of people who are interested in restoring Icelandic paganism. He also composes music for films. Mythologist Joseph Campbell encouraged Hilmar to study the Eddas, an Icelandic book that contains stories about Norse gods and goddesses. Along with some other people, Hilmar restored paganism in Iceland by using these stories as inspiration for his work.

Two men get a translation of the Eddas. The book shows Icelandic traditions. One man disagrees with the other on this issue, and they have a discussion about it.

Weiner meets Jared Bibler at a café. Iceland has made it easier for transatlantic flights to stop over, so Jared decided to stay and live in Iceland. He likes the country's geographic features and social atmosphere.

Some people feel more comfortable living in a foreign country, and they decide to stay there. Social science calls this "cultural fit." People who are individualistic (independent) tend to do better in individualistic countries like the United States. On the other hand, people who prefer to be part of groups (collectivists), do better in collectivist societies like Japan. This is because those with a good cultural fit were happier than those without one.

Weiner feels more comfortable in Iceland. Artists there seem happy, and social science shows that happiness is different from sadness. Happiness comes from the means of achieving it. It is a choice to be happy, according to Weiner's book on Iceland. He goes to a bar and drinks with friends before he leaves for the United States again.

Chapter 6: “Moldova—Happiness Is Somewhere Else”

After visiting many happy places, Weiner sets off to an unhappy place: Moldova. The former Soviet republic ranks last in the Veenhofen database of happy places. Weiner lands in Chisinau, the capital city. In the airport, people seem quite cheerful and optimistic as they greet each other and pass through customs.

Weiner meets Natasha, a Moldovan who has an apartment for him to stay at. She wears heavy makeup and short skirts. The people do not seem unhappy, but she says that they are unhappy because of insufficient money. Her grandmother does not speak much English and watches Russian soap operas.

Anthony Weiner, a politician, calls Vitalie. They arrange to meet on a walk in Moldova. Anthony notes that the people are unhappy with their current situation and have low morale.
In the streets, Weiner sees misery. Maybe he's biased because he can't see well and is seeing things that aren't really there. A blind man with sunglasses and a cane looks like some kind of caricature of a blind man hobbling down the street. An old woman hunched over so far that her torso is nearly parallel to the ground makes him think about sobbing behind him, but when he turns around, it's just another middle-aged woman with dark hair who has been crying (190).

Weiner stops at a café where people drink beer and smoke in the morning. Moldova received funding after the Soviet Union collapsed, but it has not done well economically since then. The author Pushkin lived in Moldova for some time, which he didn't like.

The bus breaks down and the Moldovans on it don't complain, which is similar to dogs that have been shocked so many times they stop trying. Weiner compares Moldovans with these animals and suggests that Moldovans are like this because of their history.

Moldovans believe their problem is simply a lack of money. According to Weiner, Moldova compares itself to wealthier countries, which makes it seem worse off than other poorer but happier countries.

Weiner goes to Moldova and buys wine, which is made there. He doesn't like it. Later he meets Vitalie at a restaurant in Moldova and eats food that he also says is disgusting. They talk about Transnistria, which is a breakaway republic from Moldova that some people don't like because they think the government has too much power over them. People in general say their own government isn't doing enough for them, but they do like how fresh the produce is there.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, political scientists note that people in democratic countries are not necessarily happier than under dictatorships. This is because democracy does not always produce happiness; rather, happy people may be more likely to create democracy. Trust is required for a successful democracy.

Luba's house is like a chocolate factory for Weiner. He eats and drinks chocolate while meeting Marisha, who helps him arrange his visit to Moldova. She also ran a website that helped men meet women from Moldova but quit because many of the women were scammers. Women in Moldova seek money and power, which causes them to be unhappy with their lives.

Weiner and Marisha visit a museum. Moldova has been invaded numerous times. Weiner mentions phrases that represent Moldova, such as “Not my problem.” Moldovans have much envy, producing unhappiness.

Psychologists in Japan found that counting the number of altruistic acts one performs increases happiness. Neuroscientists also found that part of the brain for altruism is older and located in the same place as where food and sex are processed. Weiner leaves Chisinau to go to Cahul, Moldova. He takes a van there, then another van. In Cahul he gets a hotel room and meets with members of US Peace Corps. The members complain about local culture but they do say positive things about produce there.

In a hotel café, Anthony Weiner meets Joanna from the Peace Corps. She argues that Moldovans are unhappy because they lack power and influence in their country. She feels like she is doing something to help them by being there, and therefore is happier than if she had stayed in New York City with higher-
paying jobs. Researchers find that altruism makes people happier than having high-paying careers does.

Weiner goes to Moldova and meets with a nationalist. He observes that people in the country are not very nice to each other. Then he interviews an old woman who is on the wrong bus, but everyone else makes fun of her for being on it. She's just trying to get home after all! Weiner gives her $100, which she doesn't even know about because he also put some money inside her dictionary where she would never find it until she looked up "happiness."

Luba was comfortable when the Soviet Union fell, but she lost connections with her coworkers and family. Moldova lost its culture, which is why Luba struggles to find happiness. She says that a country needs an identity in order to feel good about itself.

Weiner goes to the airport. He was not happy when he saw Moldovans there, because they made him think of his own problems. In addition, one's society affects one's happiness and poverty is not a problem in itself; it depends on how you react to it.

**Chapter 7: “Thailand—Happiness Is Not Thinking”**

Weiner visits a bar in Thailand. Foreign men pay for the pleasure of watching local women, who are known as sexpats. The Thai permissiveness is less deliberate than Dutch permissiveness, because some people stay in Thailand for sexual pleasure and not just to make money.

A resident of Thailand, Scott, describes Thai customs. He is dating a former dancer and other Thais have beautiful smiles. In Thailand people are discouraged from thinking too much about things because it can cause problems. They have an expression for this: mai pen lai (“never mind”). It means forgetting about problems instead of sulking over them. Another interesting concept that Weiner mentions is jai yen (“cool heart”), which refers to not getting angry at something or someone you don't like.

Kunip, a Thai school principal, tells a story about how he and his neighbor took care of their problems. Kunip's neighbor had a tree that grew over onto his property. Instead of getting angry, Kunip broke off one leaf from the tree. The gardener trimmed the tree as well as apologized to him for the incident. Thailand has high murder rates and violent sports like Muay Thai boxing despite its peaceful nature where people don't get mad easily. In developing countries city dwellers are happier than those in smaller towns or rural areas because they have more things to do there such as shopping malls and other fun places while in rural areas people can only farm which is not very interesting work so they're less happy even though it's easier work than what city dwellers do making them less stressed out too but still unhappy because they're doing something boring all day long everyday while city folk only have boring stuff to do sometimes compared to farmers who always have boring jobs on top of being busy with farming duties every day nonstop without breaks so it makes sense that urbanites would be happier than country folks since cities are filled with cool shops along with parks museums etc whereas rural areas just consist mainly of farms unless you live near some kind of small town or village then you might see more stores around but either way I'm sure most farmers aren't exactly having fun working outdoors all day long no matter if its hot cold rainy whatever weather conditions there may be at any given time during certain seasons plus when was the last time you heard someone say "I love going outside into my garden every morning before breakfast! Its great exercise! Plus I get fresh air daily!"? So yeah I think Weiner is
right about happiness levels between urban vs rural living...

The airport is still open after the coup. Weiner returns to Miami and reads that Surayud Chulanont, Thailand's prime minister after the coup, focuses on happiness instead of economics: "It's largely a public relations ploy, but it shows that there is room for a military government with happiness as its policy."

**Chapter 8: “Great Britain—Happiness Is a Work in Progress”**

In the United Kingdom, Weiner visits his friend Rob. English people are more reserved and critical of the pushy behavior that Americans exhibit. Weiner argues that English people don't seek happiness but rather go about their lives in a normal way. He also notes that there is currently more policy planning based on the science of happiness in England than in America. In London, he visits University College London and sees Jeremy Bentham's skeleton there. Bentham developed utilitarian philosophy: the idea of happiness for as many people as possible by subtracting unpleasant from pleasant experiences to find one’s own level of happiness or country-wide well-being.

There's a television show in the English town of Slough where six happiness experts try to change the psychology of the area. England has a tradition that is not very happy, so they chose Slough as their test case.

Experts have found that the residents of Slough are just as happy as other people in England. They then created activities to increase happiness, such as tai chi and hugging. Twelve weeks later, they found that the residents had increased their happiness by 33%, even more than top-scoring countries.

A man named Richard Stevens, who is a happiness expert on TV, responds rather rudely to the author's request for an interview. The two meet and Stevens talks about his combination of Buddhism, evolutionary psychology, positive psychology and South American dancing.

Weiner then visits Slough. The town seems dull and boring to him. He goes to a barber shop where the barber recommends that he visit the local museum, which is conveniently located in Slough. At the museum, an exhibit also mentions how convenient it is for Weiner to be there (since he's from New York). Weiner interviews Geoffrey at a pub who complains about being stuck in Slough but doesn't want to leave because of its convenience. Complaining is common among people living in England, says Geoffrey.

In the next chapter, Weiner meets Heather White. She was on a television show and dislikes Slough. As a nurse, she believes that dogs and gardens can also increase happiness. At a café, Weiner meets Richard Hill who was also on the television show. He had his first heart attack at 30 years old but says he is happy despite this fact because of Slough's multiculturalism.

Veronica Puglia also went on the television show. She became happier after she met new people, but she believes that this was because of meeting new people instead of the science behind happiness. Veronica Puglia disagrees with Weiner's theory that money cannot increase your happiness. She met a lottery winner who was happy after winning money on the show, and then found out later that he had lost his job and become sadder again. It is hard to say whether making more residents happy will have any effect on a
town; even though there were many people from Slough (a town in England) who appeared on the TV
program about how to be happy, they still remained unhappy despite their increased level of happiness:
"In Slough I can't avoid facts."

Chapter 9: “India—Happiness Is a Contradiction”

Weiner then visits India, and says that happiness is everywhere there. Although he has been to India
before as a foreign correspondent for NPR, his purpose in coming this time is different—to find why
wealthy westerners visit impoverished India to seek happiness.

Weiner visits India every year. The country is becoming more American, and many westerners visit it for
happiness. However, the World Database on Happiness has a low score for India.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, a popular guru near Bangalore, is visited by Weiner. He finds the ashram to be cold
and difficult for foreigners to adapt to Indian culture. Indians who visit the ashram have spiritual
experiences while visiting but find it difficult in other areas of their lives. Two foreign visitors also
describe difficulties in adjusting to life at an ashram but say they gain new perspectives on spirituality
through Guru-ji’s teachings.

Ami teaches a breathing technique that involves not drinking alcohol or caffeine for the next few days.
Some of the attendees see colors, but Weiner does not see anything. He is skeptical about gurus and
thinks he might be like them in some ways.

Weiner interviews some of the other attendees, including Indian IT workers. Binda is a software engineer
who doesn't understand why Weiner wants to quantify happiness. The Indians who have returned from
abroad like their country for its unpredictability. Weiner goes to see Guru-ji in person and speaks with
him at length about his questions regarding what constitutes happiness and how we can attain it.

Weiner complains about the dirt and noise in India, as well as how crowded it is. He also mentions that he
likes the food there. At a building run by an artist named Suresh, people drink coffee and smoke while
complaining about Bangalore's rapid growth rate. Weiner defends gurus against criticisms from some of
his visitors who say they like India despite its sounds. On the terrace, Weiner sees diversity in a large
country; he says that this is what makes India interesting to him.

Weiner goes to parks and cafes with two visitors, Suresh and another person. One of the people they meet
is Meena, a journalist from India. She says that Americans are very busy, but doesn't know why. Another
person named Mona comes in later on. She's happy because she thinks that thinking too much makes you
unhappy. A researcher named Robert Biswas-Diener interviews hundreds of poor people living on the
streets of Calcutta, as well as homeless people in Fremont California (USA). Surprisingly, he finds that
Calcuttans are happier than Americans even though they have fewer resources at their disposal. In India
socializing is more common than it is in America where there's less time for socialization due to the fast
pace of life

In a café, Weiner meets Sundar Sarukkai who is interested in happiness. Weiner talks about how ambition
has sabotaged his search for happiness and he wants to know what the other person thinks.
India and the United States value ambition differently. Indians also have ambition, but they let fate take its course after trying something. Weiner is happy with how things are going.

**Chapter 10: “America—Happiness Is Home”**

In the book "Future Perfect", author Steven Pinker goes to Miami. A day after arriving, his friend dies of a heart attack. He decides to move there and he blames the self-help industry for saying that happiness is within, instead of being found in community.

Americans work more than most other countries and commute farther. They also are less happy, as found by a study that looked at commuting. Americans have material wealth but they're still unhappy. The author believes this is because of the American culture of pursuing happiness, which leads to disappointment when people don't find it in their jobs or possessions. Overall, Americans remain hopeful about finding happiness despite not having it yet.

Americans often move around in search of happiness. Weiner says that this works for the people he met who moved to other countries.

Research on happier places in the United States has shown contradictory results. Some researchers have found that people are happier in Latin American countries, while others have found that people are happier if they live in cities where there is a high population density and communal arrangements. The author of this passage was unhappy when he lived in Miami because of its lack of community spirit and rudeness among residents. He met his friend Andy, who moved from Miami to Asheville, North Carolina after Hurricane Andrew struck Florida. Andy also believes that Miamians are rude.

People who live in Asheville are happy, according to Cynthia Andros. She moved there from Miami because she calculated her expected happiness and saw advertisements that indicated she would be happier living in Asheville. Laurey Masterton went to North Carolina to confront her fear of snakes, but she ended up settling in Asheville because it was a good place for her. Many other people have decided to move to Asheville as well, which is introducing new conflicts into the area and may decrease people's happiness over time.