Mains Practice Question

Essay

Q.1.Happiness is a how, not a what; a talent, not an object. (1200 words)
Q.2. In automating convenience, we have outsourced our conscience. (1200 words)

02 Aug, 2025   Essay Essay

Ans.1. Happiness is a how, not a what; a talent, not an object. (1200 words)

Introduction:

In the 1940s, **psychiatrist Viktor Frankl**, imprisoned in **Nazi concentration camps**, witnessed **unimaginable horrors**. Stripped of his **possessions**, **identity**, and even his **family**, he observed that some inmates still found **moments of peace** by sharing a crust of bread, comforting another, or simply **contemplating a sunrise** beyond the barbed wire. Frankl later wrote, *"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms — to choose one's **attitude** in any given set of circumstances."* Despite the darkness, some chose **hope over despair**. This reveals a profound truth — **happiness** is not about **what** we have, but **how** we live and respond. It is not an **object**, but a cultivated **inner capacity** — a **talent**.

Body :

Understanding the Topic

 Keywords:

- **Happiness:** A subjective state of well-being and contentment.
- **How, not a what:** Focuses on the *means/process*, not the *end or possession*.
- **Talent, not an object:** Suggests happiness is a *developable capacity or skill*, not a *material thing*.

Philosophical Perspective

Eastern Thoughts:

- **Buddhism:** Happiness arises from detachment, mindfulness, and the Eightfold Path.
- **Bhagavad Gita:** Emphasizes 'Nishkama Karma' – doing duty without expecting fruits.
- **Jainism and Yoga Philosophy:** Stress on mental discipline, moderation, and inner peace.

Western Thoughts:

- **Aristotle's Eudaimonia:** True happiness is found in virtue and the actualization of human potential.
- **Stoicism (Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius):** Happiness is achieved by controlling one's response to external events.
- **Immanuel Kant:** Morality and happiness lie in intention and duty, not in consequences.

Psychological and Scientific Understanding

- **Positive Psychology (Martin Seligman):** PERMA model — Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment.
- **Hedonic vs Eudaimonic Happiness:** Pleasure vs purpose.
- **Neuroscience Insight:** Dopamine from fleeting pleasure vs serotonin from sustained well-being.
- **Flow State (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi):** Happiness comes from deep immersion in meaningful activity.

Happiness: Not a Product, But a Process

- **Consumerism vs Contentment:** Constant chasing of goods leads to adaptation and dissatisfaction (hedonic treadmill).
- **Social Comparison Trap:** Relative deprivation affects subjective happiness.
- **Experiences over Objects:** Studies show experiences (travel, learning) yield more lasting happiness than material purchases.

Talent of Being Happy: Building Inner Strength

- **Resilience:** Ability to bounce back from adversity.
- **Mindfulness and Meditation:** Awareness of the present moment without judgment.
- **Gratitude Practice:** Daily acknowledgement of positive aspects fosters joy.
- **Self-Compassion:** Being kind to oneself during failures.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Managing one's emotions effectively enhances satisfaction.

Real-Life Examples:

- **Nelson Mandela:** Found meaning even in decades of imprisonment.
- **Helen Keller:** Found joy despite sensory limitations through purpose and learning.
- **Ordinary people in crisis (e.g., Kerala floods volunteers):** Derived happiness from helping others.

Contemporary Challenges to Happiness

- **Digital Age Distractions:** Social media leads to dopamine-driven satisfaction but erodes long-term contentment.
- **Workplace Stress and Burnout:** Overwork undermines well-being.
- **Urban Isolation:** Fragmented lifestyles reduce social bonds.

Way Forward: Cultivating Happiness as a Life Skill

- **Interpersonal Relationships:** Happiness increases when shared (empathy, love, bonding).
- **Service to Others:** Altruism, community service, and ethical living foster deeper happiness.
- **Social Capital:** Societies with trust, cohesion, and justice rank high in happiness indices (e.g., Nordic countries).
- **Curriculum Integration:** Life skills, mindfulness, and moral education.
- **Corporate Responsibility:** Employee wellness, meaningful work culture.
- **Public Health Approach:** Access to mental healthcare and community engagement programs.
  - Gross National Happiness (Bhutan)-centric growth.
  - India's Wellbeing Budgeting Initiatives (e.g., Aspirational Districts, National Mental Health Programme).

Conclusion:

Happiness is neither a **possession** to be acquired nor a **destination** to be reached; it is a **way of being** that is **lived**, **practiced**, and **cultivated** every day. As **Mahatma Gandhi** rightly said, *"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony,"* reminding us that **inner alignment**, not **material accumulation**, is the true source of joy. In a world facing rising **stress**, **disconnection**, and **consumerism**, there is a pressing need to redefine success through the lens of **well-**

being, **virtue**, and **purpose**.

Ans.2.In automating convenience, we have outsourced our conscience. (1200 words)

Introduction:

In 2017, a tragic incident in Jharkhand drew national attention: an 11-year-old girl, Santoshi Kumari, reportedly died of starvation because her family's **ration card was not linked to Aadhaar**, and the automated Public Distribution System (PDS) had denied them food for months. The biometric-based system was introduced for **efficiency and transparency**, but it left no room for human discretion when technical mismatches occurred. No official intervened, no accountability followed — the machine had simply "followed rules." This heart-wrenching case reveals a deeper truth: in our drive to automate public services for **convenience**, we risk **outsourcing moral responsibility** to systems incapable of **compassion**.

The statement *"In automating convenience, we have outsourced our conscience"* invites a critical reflection on how **technological solutions**, when devoid of **human oversight**, can lead to the erosion of **ethical engagement**.

Body :

Understanding the Key Terms:

- **"Automating convenience"**: Increasing reliance on technology (AI, algorithms, digital systems) to make life easier.
- **"Outsourced our conscience"**: Delegating moral responsibility and ethical thinking to machines, systems, or protocols.

Evolution of Automation and Convenience

- **Brief history:** Industrial Revolution → Digital Revolution → AI era.
- **Examples:**
  - Home automation, self-driving cars, smart assistants.
  - Algorithms in hiring, policing, and content curation.
- **Benefits:** Time-saving, reduced human effort, and precision.

The Erosion of Conscience

- **Delegated decisions**: Machines now decide what we read, buy, or even who gets a loan or job.
  - This reliance transforms conscience from a guiding force to a background process- present but passive.
- **Surveillance Capitalism**: Tech giants commodify personal data by tracking user behavior to predict and manipulate choices—not for public good, but for profit.
- **Ethical disengagement**: Algorithms prioritize profit or speed, not values.
  - Example: Social media platforms amplify hate speech for engagement.
- **Lack of human accountability**:
  - AI in warfare (e.g., autonomous drones)
  - AI in judicial decisions (e.g., COMPAS system in the U.S.)
- **Impact:** Automation often removes the "human moment" where conscience would otherwise intervene.

Real-World Illustrations

- **Healthcare:**
  - AI diagnosing patients — but who is responsible for a misdiagnosis?
- **Warfare and Surveillance:**
  - Drones are conducting airstrikes without human verification.
  - Facial recognition systems are leading to biased arrests.

- **Daily Life & Social Media:**
    - Newsfeeds are determined by algorithms, reinforcing echo chambers.
    - Automated customer service is denying essential services.
- In each of these, **efficiency trumps empathy**, and **convenience replaces critical thinking**.

Philosophical and Ethical Reflections

- **Immanuel Kant**: Emphasized the moral imperative of treating humans as ends, not means — automation often violates this.
- **Hannah Arendt**: "Banality of evil" — when people stop questioning and simply follow systems.
- **Gandhian Thought**: Human conscience and moral restraint are essential for societal harmony.

Way Forward

- **Reclaim moral agency**: Use tech as a tool, not a substitute for judgment **(Techno-moral Responsibility).**
- **Policy and regulation**: Mandate ethical guidelines for AI deployment.
- **Ethical literacy**: Integrate moral reasoning in STEM education.
- **Civic responsibility**: Demand accountability from tech creators and users alike.
- **Not anti-technology**, but pro-ethical innovation.
    - Examples of ethical AI frameworks (e.g., EU AI Act, UNESCO's AI Ethics guidelines).
- Emphasize **human-in-the-loop systems**: combining automation with human oversight.
    - Krishna acts as the "ethical algorithm" in the Mahabharata — intervening not based on cold logic but on yukti (wisdom), bhava (intent), and dharma (righteousness).
- Suggest ethical audits, algorithm transparency, and moral education for developers.

Conclusion:

The march of technology has undeniably transformed human life, offering **unprecedented ease, speed, and precision**. As we continue to automate decision-making in governance, justice, welfare, and even warfare, it becomes evident that we are at risk of replacing **human empathy with mechanical indifference trading Comfort at the Cost of Character**. **Automation without accountability** creates systems that may function efficiently but lack **compassion**, **context**, and **moral reflection**.

It is essential, therefore, to build a future where **technology is guided by ethics**, not isolated from it. The **human conscience** must remain central, steering innovation toward **inclusion, dignity, and justice**. As **Mahatma Gandhi** profoundly said,

"There is more to life than increasing its speed."

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