WHO IS HAPPY?
USING POEMS OF THE PHILOSOPHIZING CHILD FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE TO INSTIGATE REFLECTION IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY

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Abstract:
This essay compares the philosophical thoughts on happiness put forth in poems by Friedrich Nietzsche at the age of 12-13 with the happiness concept of Frederik, a modern secondary school student, at about the same age, who was inspired by three of Nietzsche's poems to consider his own ideas on happiness. The intent is to demonstrate that the child Nietzsche's poems, written to confront his life problems through philosophizing, can also be useful to 21st-century children, encouraging them to think about problematic and serious fundamental life questions. That this is beneficial has been demonstrated not only by Daniela Camhy in the American and Austrian language areas, but also by Hermann Josef Schmidt in his *Quadrology* written about Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's childhood and youth.

Key words: Friedrich Nietzsche; happiness; philosophy for children; poetry

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Quem é feliz? Usando os poemas da criança filosofante de Friedrich Nietzsche para investigar a capacidade de reflexão das crianças e jovens de hoje.

Resumo:
Este ensaio compara os pensamentos filosóficos aos que Friedrich Nietzsche deu forma de poemas quanto tinha 12-13 anos com o conceito de felicidade de Frederik, um estudante moderno da escola de ensino médio de aproximadamente a mesma idade, que foi inspirado por três poemas de Nietzsche para considerar suas próprias idéias acerca da felicidade. O intuito é demonstrar que os poemas do menino Nietzsche, escritos para enfrentar os problemas de sua vida com o filosofar, podem também ser úteis para crianças do século XXI, dando coragem a eles para pensar acerca de questões problemáticas e sérias da vida. Que isso é benéfico, já foi mostrado não somente por Daniela Cahmy em países de língua austríaca e inglesa, mas também por Hermann Josef Schmidt em seu *Quadrology*, escrita acerca da infância e da juventude de Friedrich Nietzsche.

Palavras chave: Friedrich Nietzsche; felicidade; filosofia para crianças; poesia

Wer ist glücklich? Gedichte des philosophierenden Kindes Friedrich Nietzsche als Reflexionsimpulse für heutige Kinder und Jugendliche

Abstract:
In diesem Aufsatz werden die philosophischen Gedanken zum Glück, die der zwölf - dreizehnjährige Friedrich Nietzsche in Gedichtsform präsentierte, mit der Glückskonzeption des etwa gleichaltrigen heutigen Werkrealschülers Frederik verglichen, der drei Gedichte Nietzsches zum Anlass nahm, um über seine eigenen Vorstellungen zum Glück nachzudenken. Es geht darum zu zeigen, dass die Gedichte, die das Kind Nietzsche geschrieben hatte, um sich philosophierend mit seinen Lebensproblemen auseinander zu setzen, auch Kindern des 21. Jahrhunderts als Impuls dienen können, sich mit problematischen und schwerwiegenden Grundfragen des Lebens zu beschäftigen. Wie heilsam dieses Nachdenken ist, konnte nicht nur Daniela Cahmy für den amerikanischen und österreichischen Sprachraum zeigen, sondern auch Hermann Josef Schmidt in seiner Quadrologie zur Kindheit und Jugend von Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche.

Keywords
Glückskonzeption des 12 - 13 jährigen Friedrich Nietzsche, Die Vergänglichkeit des Glücks, Auf der Suche nach dem Glück, Unterschiedliche Typologien im Umgang mit Glücksmöglichkeiten, Gedichte als Impuls für P4C.

who is happy? using poems of the philosophizing child friedrich nietzsche to instigate reflection in children and young people today

¿Quién es feliz? Usando en estos días poemas del filosofante niño Friedrich Nietzsche para instigar la reflexión en niños y jóvenes.

Resumen:
Este ensayo compara los pensamientos filosóficos a los que Friedrich Nietzsche dio forma de poemas cuando tenía 12-13 años con el concepto de felicidad de Frederik, un estudiante moderno de escuela secundaria de aproximadamente la misma edad, quien fue inspirado por tres poemas de Nietzsche para considerar sus propias ideas acerca de la felicidad. El intento es demostrar que los poemas del niño Nietzsche, escritos para enfrentar los problemas de su vida con el filosofar, pueden también ser útiles para niños del siglo XXI, dándoles coraje para pensar acerca de cuestiones problemáticas y serias de la vida. Que esto es beneficioso ha sido demostrado no sólo por Daniela Cahmy en los países de lengua austríaca e inglesa, sino también por Hermann Josef Schmidt en su *Quadrology*, escrita acerca de la infancia y la juventud de Friedrich Nietzsche.

Palabras clave: Friedrich Nietzsche; felicidad; filosofía para niños; poesía

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Introduction

What is happiness? How do others see it, and what does it mean to me? This everyday philosophical question, which Aristotle treated in the first book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, has always interested all young people. Daniela Cahmy, for one, has shown in the American and Austrian context just how beneficial reflecting on this fundamental question can be for finding solutions to difficult problems, as has also been indicated by Hermann Josef Schmidt in his four-volume treatise on Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's childhood and youth. In this essay I would like to examine children's competency in philosophizing from two directions. First, I will describe the development of a concept of happiness by the 12-year-old Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), who dealt with the problems in his life by philosophizing, and formulated his thoughts as poems. Second, I will introduce Frederik, a middle school student of about the same age, who responded to three of Nietzsche's poems by reflecting on his own thoughts about happiness.

1. The poems selected

I have chosen just three poems on the theme of happiness that document an inner conflict and a progressive series of solutions. In the first poem, "The Transience of Happiness," the attribution of happiness is seen as a variable of time enduring beyond the life of a single individual and revealing itself in the fates of peoples and nations. "Alfonso," the second poem, is limited to one individual life and offers many alternative experiences of happiness. Here the chief question is, "Who can judge whether someone should be called happy?" After having generally eliminated the legitimacy of external viewpoints in making such

judgments, the poet turns to the inner perspective. Going one step further, the third poem, "Two Larks," uses opposing patterns of behavior to symbolize the question of intensity's value in the experience of happiness.

2. The transience of happiness

In 1856 the twelve-year-old Nietzsche considers the relationship between the duration and the value of happiness in a poem extending backward into antiquity.

"Transience of Happiness"
(*The first part of the poem is missing*.)
(He) flees away to the nearby strand
sees there the loveliest of shows
For the sun is sending out
The first of its fiery rays
Far across the Black Sea
See o wanderer on the beach
An abandoned skiff is lying
And the wanderer climbs on in
And the waves of the sea carry him
Him (*sic*) still far to other lands

Third Canto

On Egypt's shore the small boat lands
Amazed the wanderer disembarks
Goes forth, and here, here too he sees
A land that once was so mighty
So many hundred years ago.
For here there lived a race
So splendid in monumental works
that the most recent travelers
gazed astonished on them still
And they are worthy of it.
And the wanderer steps up close
And gazes at the wondrous works
And before his eyes appear
Grand and splendid pyramids
Also built by the people here.
Now he climbs up to their tops.
And gazes from them down below
Sees the land spread out so barren
That was populated long ago
By the great Egyptian nation.
Now he descends inside
Sees the many sarcophagi
Dedicated to the king
Who caused them to be built
By that great great people.

But too long within these walls
The wanderer will not stay
Steps out to gaze at other sights
And sees the lofty obelisks
Raised from a single stone.
Now he stands by the lofty columns
And considers this old old people
That once so truly mighty was
And built these wondrous works.
Observing now he passes further.
Thinks how many peoples
Once gazed upon these structures
Greeks, Romans, and the French
Prussians and also many Turks
All looking on them still.
And in amazement the wanderer sees
The lofty rows of Memphis' columns
Sees colossi and he thinks
Could these be the works of man?
And time has taught him that.
Now how will I travel on
he asks: Look here comes an eagle
With his talons lifts him up
And on its feathered wings
He flies over many lands.

IV.
On the breeze the eagle floats
Flies so quickly that the wanderer
Hardly recalls who carried him
How astonished he is as the eagle
Slows down with him and now he sees it
Dizziness strikes him at greatest height
Yet the eagle carries him safely forth
Finally slowly sinking down
And the wanderer climbs to the ground
And beholds a land he has never seen before
Asks at once the first passer-by
What is the ground he is standing on
That one gives him the reply
That this place once mighty was
In the old old times.
For here once stood a city
Ninive by name.
Her kings were full of pride
For them it had to pay
The city and the entire realm.
Amazed the wanderer passes on
In order to behold it all.
Whatever is memorable to be seen
The columns niches windows
He looks at here within this place.
And notices that this ground too
Was brought to life once by a people
That so loved the ornamentation
That it made them proud
And they were punished by God.
Quickly now he takes a spade

Digs in the ground a gaping hole
And barely a few feet down he finds
The ground is filled with sculptures
And the wanderer delights in them
And settles joyfully down
On a lofty block of marble.
Yet suddenly is overcome by sadness
For he thinks how he has seen already
That happiness passes away.
Just now the sun goes down
Sending the last of its rays
Onto the paleness of the pilgrim's face
And the wanderer cries, once more,
Rising up from the earth.
How transient happiness is
I have seen now for myself.
Eternal it is found in heaven.
He speaks and lowers in parting his pale head
And fell forthwith into the hole he had dug there.
BAW I, 347-349

In this poem Friedrich Nietzsche follows the path of a wanderer who fails to realize his at first implicit, then explicit demand that happiness should have permanence.The wanderer, carried to Egypt by a small boat, looks first with astonishment at the monuments bearing witness to a once great people, the pyramids and obelisks, and he "considers" their fleeting destiny. And so it is not the lack of happiness that is being lamented here, but only the lack of its "unlimited duration even beyond the lifetime of the individual Egyptian" (Schmidt 1991, 219). What causes happiness to end, the reason why the "once populated land now lies so barren" is not yet specified here, but only in the second half of the poem, during the contemplation of Ninive, a place that in the "old old times" was very powerful. The splendidly ornamented structures are an indication of pridefulness in the kings and population, for which they had to suffer. God punished them. 'Happiness' by this standard would seem to be a dangerous blessing, capable of bringing humankind into conflict with the divine powers and calling them into action. Hermann Josef Schmidt asserts that for the child Nietzsche the themes of punishment and revenge, as a possible interpretation of the fateful events he himself had suffered, "are among the unmistakable

fundamental problems (and deeply shattering basic experiences) that the child is trying to process in his poetry" (Schmidt 1991, 219).

In the last section the wanderer himself takes up a shovel and begins to act as an archaeologist. He finds "the ground full of sculptures" and is overjoyed. But abruptly the mood turns, and suddenly there is nothing but a deep sadness, not even to be mitigated by the cheering natural display of the setting sun. The wanderer is caught up in his thoughts about the transience of happiness. "If good fortune can only truly make us happy when it is everlasting, then human life, even in times of the greatest cultural flowering, becomes meaningless (Schmidt 1991,220). But is this really Nietzsche's position? Schmidt suggests that Nietzsche, by means of his parodistic conclusion, introduces a contradictory voice: "after having exhausted through his rejection of a transient happiness his possibilities of finding meaning for life on earth, the wanderer fell "into the grave he had dug himself.' In his fatal fall, the wanderer pursues his hostile view of life with such consistency that the borderline separating it from persiflage, parody, or caricature has become, at the very least, a narrow one" (Schmidt 1991, 221). To indicate that lasting happiness cannot exist on Earth, the child Nietzsche formulates it this way in the third line from the end: "Eternal it is found in heaven."

3. Alfonso: the search for happiness

Alfonso

1. On the castle's lofty tower
Sits Alfonso sad and pale
Filled with unspeakable desire
For what is known as happiness.

2. And he thinks of ancient heroes
All enrobed in might and power
To subdue and rule the nations
That was surely not real happiness.

3. He calls to mind the forefathers themselves
Oh sadly, how often even his father
Named to him with tears misfortunes,
Humiliations of his paternal house

4. Oh! Beauty! What might it be
He meditates by day and night
And turning away each plate of food
In introspection he abides

5. And there he sits then brooding
Sees the sun sink down
Breaks out in tearful words
Cries out all torn by pain

6. O sun! You witness to my woe
You sink again and leave me here
Grieving and so torn by doubt
If only I would sink like you into the grave.

7. Yes it sinks! With stripes of fiery red
The heaven fills up its gown of blue
A gloomy fog sinks all around
Darkness falls; by the Cid as well.

8. Hark! What is ringing so sweet and refined
It comes from an ancient cloister, the lovely tone
It calls the people all to rest and prayer
For him it brings no peace by day and night.

9. Now the night has fallen
He has conceived the plan
Forth from here he will travel
Until he has found what he seeks

10. And in the morrow's dawn
He takes his pilgrim's staff
A robe of gray goes with him
As is the pilgrim's way.

11. Already he has traveled far
Already he is tired; then comes
An aged man to meet him
Alfonso where do you intend to go?

12. It is the venerable Padre
He's recognized his lord
He takes him into the cottage
And refreshes him with a drink.

13. The Padre could imagine
The old nobleman's plan
He had observed him often
Sorrowful in his castle.

14. In parting from Alfonso
He gives him good instruction
Trust no one who before his death
Has the semblance of happiness.

15. The Cid takes it to heart
He thinks about the words

Happy only when dead
That he cannot believe.

16. And he takes as pilgrims do
With thanks his walking staff
Departs from him a teacher
Endowed indeed with doctrine wise.

17. Wandering Alfonso goes on his way
And arrives at the seashore wondering
To where he should further direct his steps
There appears in the distance a little ship
And it draws nearer and he hears
Songs born from the mouth of the people
In happiness passes our life til at last
Death reaches each of us in various forms
Whipped by violent storms the sea swallows some
Others find death where the enemy's bullet bores through him
Yet but one of all these is hailed as completely happy
The one who joyously ends a life in loving communion with friends
To make a pilgrimage forth from the earth
To join with the Highest and seeing once more the loved ones
By death torn away with arms of iron on former journeys
In everlasting joy he spends a time that will never end.
So sounded the song from the mouths of the rowing boatmen
And Alfonso hears with a joyful demeanor the words
Again the darkness the power the words of the Padre
Still veiled to him were by the words of the rowing boatmen
After all in small part revealed;
Now he will try to resemble these people
To be as happy as they and decides
To become a boatman himself, always working with oars
To catch in the widely cast net fish for the daily meal.

18. And he speaks to the boatmen at anchor busied with washing their nets
With imploring words: O take me
As your companion eager to serve you!
The boat's leader approaches with friendly words
Asks for the reason that brought him to this
And declares at the end: Alfonso
Take my advice: There lives close by
There in wild mountains unseen in a gloomy cave
One who may give you the answer
So go there in haste! and wishing him luck disappeared.
There a wild mountainous landscape torn by ravines and valleys
Dark brush on all sides tall towering trees
And in the middle well covered with leaves.
A trap door woven of willow
Surprised appears at his knocking a graybeard
Who brings you stranger to me
What is it that leads your steps this way.
Don Alfonso replies: I come in friendship.
Just wishing an answer to following question
Which one can be called completely happy?
The old man calls out so come down to me
No one has yet left my house without a good answer:
I repeat the words of the wise man of Greece
Call no one who lives in pleasures and fame

> Happy, for each day misfortune can still overtake him
> When after a praiseworthy life you've arrived at your father's
> Then may the people regard you rightly as happy in life.
> You know it best then yourself.

BAW I, 377-379 (Numbering of the verses has been added for orientation in the discussion.)

With this poem the child Nietzsche shows that within the previous year the question of happiness has become still more urgent, or that he now has the capacity to formulate it more forcefully and with greater complexity. Alfonso makes contact with various groups of people and their conceptions of happiness, always in search of an answer that could also suffice for him. The answers of these others are revealed as false solutions to his problem; Alfonso must find his own criteria for deciding whether or not something signifies happiness for him.

This search for happiness begins with a desperate vehemence standing in absolute contradiction to the question's content, and it is also blind to the sources of happiness that are close at hand.

1) *Fame through heroic deeds and the power of rulers*; Nietzsche is familiar with this as the "Greek myth," long admired by the young graecophile.

2) *Integration into the world and the tradition of his father*; the rejection of this position means breaking with the idealization and modeling function that Nietzsche's dead father still long retained for the child

3) *The religious consolations of the Christian community that heeds the bell's call*; in response to this the child Friedrich Nietzsche, known since the age of five as "the little Pastor," has Alfonso declare that while others might find inner peace in this way, his own suffering was not touched by it.

"Obviously Alfonso is not looking for just any solution, but one that is his own" (Schmidt 1991, 243). Even though he is looking for a personal answer suitable for himself, Alfonso decides to take an educational journey, so as to first gather all existing opinions in the best Aristotelian manner before coming to his own conclusion. "Alfonso begins his search for happiness here with an external orientation: it all depends on what "people" consider happiness to be. And yet this kind of orientation, meant to quickly satisfy the questioner with a predetermined

answer, stands in a peculiarly tense relationship to the "unquenchable" longing so powerful that it evades all designation" (Schmidt 1991, 243).

The first answer-bearer Alfonso meets is a Padre who proclaims the same thing that Aristotle cited as bequeathed wisdom in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "For many changes occur in life, and all manner of chances, and the most prosperous may fall into great misfortunes in old age, as is told of Priam in the Trojan Cycle; and one who has experienced such chances and has ended wretchedly no one calls happy (I,9)…Must no one at all, then, be called happy while he lives; must we, as Solon says, see the end? Even if we are to lay down this doctrine, is it also the case that a man is happy when he is dead? " (I, 10) 1[1] „Happy only when dead / That he cannot believe." So Alfonso travels on and in the third part of the poem encounters a group of fishermen who present their "theory of happiness in musical form" (Schmidt 1991, 252), and in doing so reflect on death. Here different levels of happiness are introduced: *normal happiness in everyday life*: "In happiness passes our life til … death overtakes …us," and *intensified happiness*: only that person "is hailed as completely happy" who, like Socrates or Epicure "joyously ends a life in loving communion with friends" These thoughts from the Greek tradition are then amplified in the same section with Christian notions.

"The song juxtaposes two concepts of happiness: one purely immanent, deriving from antiquity and corresponding more or less to the Fragments of Solon, and one that 'far surpasses it,' combining an archaic-pederastic Symposium perspective (from Alkaios on) with partly Christian notions of an afterlife" (Schmidt 1991, 253). Whereas the Padre still left open the question whether a person could already be called happy before death, the boatmen are explicit in singing of themselves as happy, even facing the undeniable possibility of death in the waves or in war. Thus they represent a heroic and purely immanent conception

1[1] As translated by W. D. Ross, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html

of happiness that corresponds to the views of early Greek wise men (such as Solon).

But the boatmen are not just singing about themselves. Rather, in the course of their song they change the level and mode of representation: "They no longer are speaking of themselves, but presenting a summation. Out of 'all people' only that one is 'hailed as completely happy' who fulfills a great many very different conditions…(he) …would have to at least (1) joyously end his life (2) in loving communion (3) with friends, (4) journey (5) forth from the Earth (6) to the place (7) of union (8) with the Highest, (9) recognizing again (10) the loved ones that death with iron arms (11) tore away on a pilgrimage long ago (12) spending time everlasting (13) in eternal joy" (Schmidt 1991, 252).

Alfonso finds this complex happiness-conglomerate so appealing that he is infected by the fishermen's joyous mood and wants to be taken into their community. In the enthusiasm of his attraction, however, he neglects to consider differences in life context and preconditions, for example age, education, answers to questions about the meaning of life, and so on. His 'self-surrender' and readiness to conform are blocked by the fishermen's leader, a 'wise man with therapeutic gifts,' who sends him further into the mountains: "His path forward is as little their own as are his problems." (Schmidt 1991, 252)

Nonetheless, Alfonso can take something away from his encounter with the fishermen: the question concerning intensification of happiness, so that he immediately asks the old man in the forest about the superlative form of happiness: "Which one can be called completely happy?" But the old man deflects both the superlative character of the question and the fundamental idea that it can be answered by others. In the last line he refers his interrogator back to himself: "You know it best then yourself." Alfonso himself is the only authority on earth that can make judgments about his happiness.

With this Nietzsche rejects from a twofold perspective the judgmental authority of external viewpoints. The criterion for happiness is revealed neither to

the lone thinker through reception of traditional values nor to the active traveler through life styles he encounters. The finally persuasive answer points to an inner perspective: each person knows best whether he feels happy and what makes him happy. And yet the path Nietzsche follows in his poem is by no means trivial. Results of social-psychological research into the pressures of group conformity have shown how difficult it is to really adhere to one's own feelings and act in accordance with them (Manfred Sader, 1991).

The abandonment of the external perspective for the judgment of happiness becomes clear in the poem "Two Larks," written a short time later. Here the young Nietzsche consistently follows the inner perspective and "feels through" two differing possibilities for dealing with experienced happiness.

4. Two Larks: variant typologies in approaching possibilities of happiness

Two Larks

I heard as two larks sang
Their song so bright and clear
Their flight on joyous wings
So wondrous against the sky

The one approached the sun
But blinded shrank away
And after often thought with joy
About this happiness now lost.

And yet it does not dare to raise
Its wings up to that ray of light
It fears its striving might at last
Bring it to a painful end

The other urgent and brave
Wings upward toward the sun
Yet closes its eyes so fearfully
On this never taken path.

But then unable to withstand
It feels an irresistible desire
To see the heavenly rays
With hardly a thought left for itself

It looks into the gleaming sun
Gazes without complaint
In heavenly joy and bliss,
Til its eyes at last grew dark. --??

The poem of this precocious child is strikingly accomplished in its form. The boy is now able to present his years of reflection, despair and emotional searching in pointed abstract form as the contrast between two types of behavior. Yet it can't be assumed that here he has found a final answer, since neither the uncompromising solution nor the cautious one, in which life is nourished by memory, offers a realistic perspective on life.

The first of the two larks in this poem represents, for one thing, an early form of the "antiquarian" personality type (second of the *Untimely Meditations*) who lives in thoughts and memory, but for the most part sacrifices happiness in the present. The second lark, on the other hand, "wings upward 'urgent and brave,' – that is, not as a consequence of insight – into the sun, closing its eyes, thus flying blind, on 'never taken path.' It can't resist, even if it wanted to; it 'feels an irresistible desire' and has 'hardly a thought left for itself,' thus experiencing an ecstatic state. It looks into the sun's radiance without complaint, 'in heavenly joy and bliss, til at last it saw no more.--??'" (Schmidt 1991, 347f.). In this poem Nietzsche stays purely on the descriptive plane, yet through positioning, rhythm, and word choice he makes his preferences clear. He documents positive feelings for both larks, since both are striving toward the sun, a symbol personally meaningful to him that he uses in many poems. The sun's image is always brought to bear by Nietzsche when the topic is the problematics of happiness, and so it has a presence in all three poems.

The larks, on the other hand, as mentioned above, embody distinct typologies in the way they deal with possibilities of happiness. To underline this, Nietzsche draws the second lark so that its behavior is opposite in almost every way to that of the first lark. "There is no doubt that the two larks represent heterogeneous modes of existence. The one follows its urges and lives them out; it is in ecstasy and 'remains therein.' The other is more likely to rationalize its existence, does not enter into and remain within the fullness of life, but goes on living….Thinking helps it – in contrast to its counterpart – to achieve 'second-hand

happiness,' happiness cautiously dosed, but with less intensity" (Schmidt 1991, 350).

Like all works of art, this poem too has many levels and a persuasive power that aids not only its author in his development and his process of clarification. Works set free from their contexts possess an independent emanation and enter into their own quite unique correspondence with the recipient. This is why today in the areas of literary studies and reader psychology many forward-looking researchers focus on the effects of reader reception (Norbert Groeben, Peter Vorderer, 1998). My own special interest has been in how these expressive poems of the philosophizing child Friedrich Nietzsche would work to inspire reflection in today's children.

5. The poems of the philosophizing child Friedrich Nietzsche as instigation for Frederik's reflections on happiness

5.1 The transience of happiness

Researcher: What do you think: why is the first poem entitled "Transience of Happiness"?

Frederik: *He was looking at these monuments and then ha saw that the once so powerful kings had built them and that they now aren't rulers any more. They had so much good fortune and now it's over.*

Researcher: Try to put yourself in the shoes of Friedrich Nietzsche, who was exactly the same age you are now, as I already told you. What might he have been feeling as he wrote the poems?

Frederik: *He felt sad because the monuments are nearly destroyed and the people have lost their culture. Maybe he had read a book back then that talked about the Egyptians and the people of Ninive.*

Researcher: After the flight with the eagle, when the wanderer asks where he is, he hears that the city of Ninive had stood there once, but "Her kings were full of pride

/ For them it had to pay / the city and the entire realm." What effect does that have on you?

Frederik: *Very harsh. I think it's harsh because the kings were punished just because of their pride.*

Researcher: Why does Friedrich even mention the fate of Ninive. Wouldn't his description of the desolate ruined kingdom of ancient Egypt have been enough to demonstrate the transience of happiness?

Frederik: *He wanted to give more examples so that every person would understand it. Some people think that it serves the Egyptians right, and that's why he gave other examples. He thinks that God punished the people of Ninive, but not the Egyptians. He used Ninive as an example because apparently they were punished by God, and the Egyptians weren't.*

Researcher: The poem often mentions that the wanderer "thinks," "considers," sits down on a stone and reflects upon what he has seen. You probably know a lot of boys in Friedrich's age group. Have you heard twelve-year-olds talking very often about someone reflecting on things?

Frederik: *No, never.*

Researcher: Do twelve-year-olds like to reflect on things?

Frederik: *I do. Maybe twelve-year-olds are embarrassed to say so because others might make fun of them. I like to do it anyway.*

Researcher: Why do you think Friedrich writes so often that the wanderer "thinks," "considers," and so on?

Frederik: *Because Friedrich probably really liked to think about things.*

Researcher: So why does the wanderer think that the people in the ancient kingdoms were happy? Do you have any ideas about that?

Frederik: *He could only imagine that they were happy because they built such beautiful structures.*

Researcher: Why does Friedrich have the wanderer fall into his own hole at the end and die?

Frederik: *Because happiness is only in heaven….It's written right here: "Eternal it is found in heaven." He wants to say here that happiness on earth is never eternal.*

Researcher: Imagine that your friend would ask you what type of person this wanderer is. How would you describe him?

Frederik: *Old, walking stick, green outfit, wise, very wise. I've been imagining him that way the whole time.*

Researcher: Can you understand it that a boy of twelve would write such a poem?

Frederik: *No, I see it as a great accomplishment for him.*

5.2 Alfonso

Researcher: Can you imagine how Alfonso is feeling and describe his problem for me?

Frederik: *He wants to know the meaning of happiness and is unhappy because he doesn't know what it is. He wants to fight against his sad state of mind.*

Researcher: Can you understand the problem or does it seem strange to you?

Frederik: *I can't understand it because he expresses himself so melodramatically.*

Researcher: Now we'll go through the poem more carefully, and you tell me what each of these conceptions of happiness means, in your opinion.

Frederik:

- Verse 2: *Alfonso didn't find domination and ruling happy because it was cruel.*
- Verse 3: *Even in his own house there is unhappiness. People think that everything is ok at home, but unfortunately that isn't the case.*
- Verse 8: *For the others it's nice to hear the bells, but not for him. For the others the prayer means peace, but not for him.*
- Verses 14 + 15: *The Padre thinks that he shouldn't call anyone happy before they die, because something can always happen later. Alfonso thinks that can't be right, because when a person is happy, that person stays happy.*
- Verse 17: *The fishermen think that everyone dies happy, no matter how, and the person who has his friends at his bedside dies in the best way. This time Alfonso agrees.*

- Verse 18: *The old man tells Alfonso that you only know at the end whether you had a happy life.*

Researcher: What do you think of these answers?

Frederik: *Some of them are good, for example I like the old man's answer, and also the Padre's. As to the fishermen, I don't like their idea that a person is supposed to be happy even if he dies in battle or drowns in the ocean. I only like their idea that the happiest death is with friends.*

Researcher: In your opinion, what's the point of looking for an answer to the question of who is happy?

Frederik: *That you can be happy yourself if you know who is happy.*

Researcher: What is the old man trying to say with his last sentence: "You know it best then yourself"?

Frederik: *In the first place, he wants to put Alfonso's mind at rest because he is always searching. In the second place, because it's Alfonso who has lived his life and people can't look inside him. That's why he knows it best.*

4.3 Two Larks

Researcher: Is Friedrich just trying to say something in this poem about two birds, or do the larks and the sun stand for something else?

Frederik: *They stand for something else. It's a parable. The one lark that only took a quick look stands for a person who only enjoyed happiness for a short time. The other one stands for a person who enjoyed so much happiness that he burst, you know, he was so full. The sun stands for radiant happiness.*

Researcher: What's the difference between the two larks?

Frederik: *The one behaved in the right way who only enjoyed it for a short time and the other, the one that burst, behaved wrong.*

Researcher: What idea of happiness does the first lark have?

Frederik: *To enjoy it for a short time and remember it for a long time.*

Researcher: What is the second lark's idea of happiness?

Frederik: *To take in as much as possible.*

Researcher: Which lark do you resemble more?

Frederik: *Sometimes I take in a lot, but sometimes I hold myself back.*

5.4 General Questions

Researcher: Which poem did you like best?

Frederik: *The third one, because you can fit almost any kind of person in there. It's expressed well and is a nice parable.*

Researcher: So now you've taken a good look at the poems of Friedrich, who is your age, as you know. What image do you have of him? Use your imagination for a minute.

Frederik: *First from the outside, then the inside: round face, fat, short legs. Now from the inside: clever, intelligent, friendly. He likes the sunset and sunrise, friendly people. His hobbies are reading and writing poems.*

5.5 Questions about Friedrich's Conception of Happiness

Researcher: What do you think most people consider happiness?

Frederik: *Happiness in life, as it's generally shown in poetry.*

Researcher: Have you yourself ever thought about what happiness is?

Frederik: *Yes, often. I've wondered whether everyone can be happy. Whether everyone can have the same degree of happiness. Can a person lose happiness? Can happiness be controlled?*

Researcher: Can you name a few situations where you felt happy?

Frederik: *For example when we were on vacation, or when I got a Yahtze while playing the game Yahtze (Here I mean luck in the roll of the dice.)*

Researcher: What is happiness for you?

Frederik: *For me happiness is when a person has had a happy experience or else when a person had good luck somewhere, maybe in a game, and when a person gets lucky in an accident.*

6. A Comparison of the Interpretations

This conversation shows that Frederik, a student at a vocational school (*Hauptschule*), has engaged intensively with the poems. He gives interpretations that can be taken seriously and are worth comparing to expert interpretations. The expert we have been citing, professor Hermann Josef Schmidt, begins his interpretations with Nietzsche's biography and tries to use the texts to explain the boy's feelings, states of mind, thoughts and philosophical points of departure, thus attempting to offer an original Nietzsche interpretation. Naturally this possibility is not open to Frederik. In his case the poems must speak for themselves and their effect arises solely from their artistic expressiveness. Both readers, the professor and the boy, are noticeably moved by the poems, and not just on the conscious cognitive level, but also on deeper, unconscious levels touching on personal questions, needs, and life wounds of each. So both interpreters, with a common personal response, allowed themselves to be so touched by the poetry of this young philosopher who lived 140 years ago that they brought the weight of their own persons into the discussion, making available their personal thoughts, and thus engaging openly with the texts.

6.1 Transience of happiness: The first important theme developed by Schmidt on the basis of the tragic childhood experiences is the theme of punishment and revenge that is able to extinguish an apparently secure happiness. (Nietzsche's father died after a painful illness when his son was four, and shortly thereafter his little brother also died.) Frederik also finds God's reaction "very harsh;" just like Nietzsche, he sees no justification for the divine behavior, but neither does he directly criticize it.

Schmidt concludes on the basis of the language structure and the parodistic nature of the poem's conclusion that Nietzsche rejects the wanderer's demand for permanent happiness. Through the line "Eternal it is found in heaven," Frederik

comes to the same conclusion that happiness on earth can never be eternal, that is, that someone who makes this demand is not capable of living. It must be granted, however, that Frederik is not in a position to reflect upon the possible irony of this sentence.

Both the vocational student and the professor conclude from various pieces of evidence that Nietzsche is a child who likes to think. Both are impressed by him and believe that the poem is a great accomplishment for a twelve-year-old.

6.2 Alfonso: **Whereas Frederik was easily able to identify with the wanderer in the first poem, he found it much harder in the case of Alfonso. He found him "so melodramatic." Schmidt characterizes this attitude as a paradox that "includes the more pathological forms of 'happiness'."**

Frederik recognizes correctly that Alfonso does not find the conventional offerings of happiness appealing. Unlike Alfonso, Frederik finds Solon's wisdom persuasive, and he relates it immediately to the answer of the old man, whose position Frederik likes best. For Frederik – like Schmidt – starts from the premise that the old man is directing Alfonso toward the inner perspective as the only possible way to make judgments about happiness. Frederik argues in favor of this, suggesting that others cannot see into Alfonso's mind, and so they cannot know whether or not he has felt happiness in any given situation.

On the other hand, Frederik is unable to assess the significance of the boatmen's song. Here he lacks the life experiences that formed the background for Nietzsche. Frederik notes the comparative element in assessing the superlative form of happiness, namely that "the *happiest* death is (the one) among friends." Frederik is able to identify personally with that.

Frederik does not accept a radical rejection of the external perspective as a source of knowledge about happiness; he finds it quite useful to consider the conceptions of happiness held by others. It is his premise "that you can be happy yourself if you know who is happy."

6.3 Two Larks: This poem speaks most strongly to Frederik, both in its content and in its parabolic form. In contrast to Nietzsche, who makes no direct judgment, the cheerful boy Frederik judges the larks' behavior as right or wrong based on the consequences. In so doing he alters the image: the lark's eye does not grow dark, it "bursts" because it is filled to excess with happiness. Frederik does take into account the lark's passion, but not the conditions leading up to it, which Schmidt analyses with subtlety. Whereas Schmidt identifies the young Nietzsche more closely with the first lark, Frederik identifies himself on the behavioral level with both larks: "*Sometimes I take in a lot, but sometimes I hold myself back*." Since for Frederik the literary form of the parable is foregrounded, he sees the end of the second lark purely symbolically, and places a greater emphasis on the quantitative rather than the radical qualitative difference between the two larks. This is why he has no problem integrating the second lark into his *life perspectives.* Such a flattened interpretation makes it possible for him to place the people around him on a continuum between the two larks as contrasting end points in the approach to happiness. In addition to the aesthetic consideration, this social-psychological aspect is the reason why Frederik likes this poem best, "*because you can fit almost any kind of person in there*."

"*The sun stands for radiant happiness*." Frederik does not need to go into it any further; with this sentence he has said it all. For him, the poems of the child Friedrich Nietzsche are already real works of art containing general truths and, due to their high levels of abstraction, allowing each individual to form a personal connection from the poem to concrete phenomena.

7. Frederik's conception of happiness.

The interview shows that Frederik has also thought about happiness at various times. Like Nietzsche, he connects the question of happiness with the question of fate (*Fatum, Tyche* , and so on). Thus when Frederik is asked, "Have you yourself ever thought about what happiness is?" he replies, "*Yes, often. I have*

wondered whether every person can be happy. Whether everyone can have the same degree of happiness. Can a person lose happiness? Can happiness be controlled?" Although nowadays we have left behind the Greeks' mythological way of thinking, in which humans felt themselves to be the Gods' "playthings," and which was absorbed by the young Nietzsche from many poems and aphorisms, factors still remain that are beyond our technical reach and thus resistant to our control. This element of incomplete autonomy in controlling one's own fate is a constant in all of Frederik's answers as he sketches out his own conception of happiness.

Nevertheless, the *possibility* of experiencing happiness can be produced through favorable circumstances by seeking out situations that promise happiness. Here Frederik mentions vacations as an example. The other aspect, the lack of control over happiness, can be seen, according to Frederik, in the example of "*the roll of the dice*" or "*when someone gets lucky in an accident.*"

In order for happiness to be grasped at all cognitively and emotionally, it needs to be consciously interpreted as happiness. Frederik hints at this with the sentence, "*For me happiness is when a person has had a happy experience*." In this statement there is a certain tension between *I* and *a person*. On the one hand the relation to the self is being reflected upon, on the other Frederik is expanding the question, considering also the other people. Not only is he happy when he himself "*has had a happy experience*," but also when the same fate befalls others. Frederik does not give specifics about the content. It is clear to him that differing conceptions of happiness exist. But only the experience matters.

This view parallels conclusions of research into depression: as long as an "earthly good" is not seen as such, and so fails to elicit the corresponding mental, emotional, and physical reactions, then one cannot speak of "happiness" (Sader, 1991).

Thus Frederik's conception of happiness is characterized in its main points by the following contrasting elements:

-the lack of control over happiness as "fate"

-the conscious experience of the available happiness

-the seeking out of situations that, according to one's self-knowledge, seem to promise the experience of happy feelings.

In this article I have presented the reactions of a young person to the young Nietzsche's poems, and shown that these poems are indeed capable of stimulating and encouraging children and young people today to philosophize about their own positions.

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