

Original Paper

The Quest for Happiness: From Boethius to Marie de France and

Heinrich Kaufringer

The Meaning of the Humanities Today and in the Future

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Abstract

As much as money has always seemed to rule world, in reality many other criteria have really determined human life providing meaning, guidance, and relevance, such as the quest for happiness. Happiness can be expressed in many different ways and finds expression in a myriad of ways, including through literature. Hence, we need to differentiate between spiritual and material happiness, and thus can establish significant concepts about the various layers of the meaning of life. Only a Humanities-based study program can offer relevant perspectives, as we need the teachings from the past in order to cope with the issues of today and tomorrow. This paper draws on a selection of major literary and philosophical contributions from late antiquity to the fifteenth century to illustrate this most important insight, which redirects our attention to the Humanities as one of the most central study areas in the academy today. As evanescent as the quest for happiness might be, ultimately there proves to be no other more important topic in all of human existence.

Keywords

Relevance of the Humanities, quest for happiness, Boethius, Marie de France, Heinrich Kaufringer

1. Introduction

It is a favorite method of any upper university administration or governing board across the world to use the Humanities as a scapegoat for any kind of financial problems and to place individual departments on the chopping block, maybe because of low enrollment, maybe because a specific discipline seems vulnerable enough for this restructuring move. The public also commonly considers the Humanities as a luxury item maybe useful for the High School/Gymnasium/Lycée, etc., whereas the university should be reserved for ‘real’ research and ‘pragmatic’ teaching in the science fields, in

medicine, business, and engineering in order to produce sufficient graduates to enter immediately the job market. Money speaks a very loud language, especially with regard academia, and since everyone is looking for a direct economic outcome of an advanced university degree, the Humanities simply do not fare well, or so it seems.

On the contrary, however, there are many indicators confirming almost the opposite because students graduating with a B.A., M.A., or even a Ph.D. in any language, literature, in rhetoric, in history, anthropology, in the visual arts, music, but also in sociology and psychology normally can demonstrate a high degree of competence in many different areas, including research abilities, critical thinking, excellent writing skills, and intercultural competence.

The College of Humanities at the University of Arizona, where I teach, embraces this idea as fundamental for all of our students: “College of Humanities students learn essential skills with a human perspective to navigate the workforce of the future” (<https://humanities.arizona.edu/>); for a video presentation, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSJuc0q0Te4&t=10s>; both last accessed on Nov. 23, 2022). Indeed, even national statistical data confirm that a degree in a Humanities field proves to be quite profitable and productive, leading the graduates normally to enriching and satisfying job opportunities, at least in the United States (there are countless websites for this purpose; see, for instance, <https://www.coursera.org/articles/what-is-a-humanities-major>; for career resources, see <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Career/Career-Resources>; for job market data, see <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Career/Job-List/Reports-on-the-MLA-Job-List>; all last accessed on Nov. 23, 2022).

2. How to Defend the Humanities Today

Many scholars have already reflected profoundly on the relevance of the Humanities, but this paper aims for a more philosophical approach to this tantalizing question, reflecting specifically on the essence of some of the most powerful texts produced since late antiquity, bringing home their critical messages for us today. My particular angle here is focused on the topic of happiness, a goal that all individuals here on earth are pursuing as their most urgent need. No money can simply buy happiness however we might want to define it, apart from the temporary, materialist form of happiness, though that quickly proves to be a fleeting experience.

The concept of happiness, virtually the foundation of all religion and philosophy throughout time, here will imply the experience of fulfilled love, a sense of connection with a larger entity (maybe the divine), a strong feeling of individuality or selfhood, a certain degree of freedom, a distinct level of creativity, and the presence of a community of friends, and family. For some people, gaining political or financial power appears to achieve the same effect, but in the long run they experience the very opposite, at times even being assassinated in their role of state leaders and the like, as has happened many times both in recent history and in the past.

In very specific ways, literature has always proven to be the essential gateway for the exploration of fundamental issues in human existence, including happiness. Other topics addressed pertain to the issue of death, to the quest for God, to the probing of heroism and individuality, the gender relationship, or the investigation of the meaning of life at large. In many ways, the critical engagement with various extreme situations as outlined in fictional texts, for instance, serves exceedingly well for the long-term learning process all human beings have to go through, whether we think of the world classics, or minor, ignored, neglected, forgotten, or disregarded texts. Written documents facilitate a theoretical reflection of life situations, especially when we face extreme conditions, such as betrayal, hatred, passion, fury, war, violence, or a utopian world. Studying literature, above all – apart from philosophical treatises, musical compositions, or art works – allows for critical examinations of particular aspects in human life without being forced to go through those in concrete terms ourselves. In other words, we learn critical lessons about ethics, morality, spirituality, and also social conditions through the close reading of the experiences of literary protagonists.

3. Fundamental Values and Ethics

We are, as representatives of the Catholic Church had already formulated in the fourth and fifth centuries (especially John Cassian), easily victims of the so-called Seven Deadly Sins in our lives (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_deadly_sins; last accessed on Nov. 27, 2022) and have to struggle all the time to fend them off and to strive for the Seven Virtues (parallel formulations can be found in the other world religions, of course; cf. Newhauser, ed., 2012). Many times, however, sinfulness, lack of virtues, evilness, and the like seem to win the game, and each generation has to return to the basic drawing board to figure out their own conditions, values, ideals, and social norms. Teaching literature thus proves to be an essential and ongoing process which should really grant the Humanities a central position within academia (Nussbaum, 2012; Collini, 2012).

To reflect on this more specifically, the study of any field in the Humanities undoubtedly allows us to explore in theoretical, i.e., fictional, terms what constitutes the most burning issues in all of our existence, how to address them, and how to engage with the ordinary and extraordinary situations perceived through the lens of literature or the arts. Not by chance, the theme of love has been one of the central ones in fictional texts throughout time. In particular, closely connected with this, happiness proves to be the most critical challenge and yet greatest need, and this from early on since antiquity. Throughout time, we have learned from authors and thinkers how to address that ideal and its endangerment, and it is our critical task in the Humanities to pave the way toward the critical exploration of how to find it for ourselves.

The challenge that I have set here for myself would really require a book-length investigation, if not an entire library (Drees, 2021). Moreover, countless popular writers have addressed this issue as well, whereas we really ought to examine how major philosophers and thinkers reflected on it so that we do not re-invent the proverbial wheel of history. Nevertheless, the focus on individual happiness as

reflected on even by only a small selection of major writers promises to yield useful insights and argumentative strategies in our daily battles to defend our field within the academia and to justify our existence.

Graduating students need to have some specific arguments in their hands to explain to the world what they have studied over several years, what it all meant for them, and how they intend to proceed in their future lives. My claim here is simply that if they gain a certain sense of happiness as suggested by literary or philosophical writers throughout time, and then can pursue the same path on their own, we would have mostly achieved our goals as researchers and instructors in the Humanities. This approach might seem to be a bit intangible or vague at first, but it certainly sustains any human individual effectively in the long run, especially in times of need, sorrow, suffering, depression, and frustration. True happiness might be elusive at first sight, and yet when we can learn from the experiences of others and gain new perspectives as the proverbial dwarfs on the shoulders of giants (Bernard of Chartres), then the study of the Humanities makes perfect sense. Irrespective of the selection of texts made for this study, whether from antiquity or the Middle Ages, from the eighteenth or the twenty-first century, the ultimate purpose will remain the same, the examination of the human individual in his/her fundamental conditions and thus to establish a basis for the own existence.

4. Boethius

All literature has to be read, first and foremost, through a philosophical lens, whether the poets/authors addressed or responded to philosophical teachings directly or not. The late-antique philosopher Boethius provided us with a perfect example for this observation when he composed the monumental dialogue treatise *De consolazione philosophiae* (ca. 524; Boethius, 2020). It deeply influenced not only generations of subsequent readers, but has exerted an inexhaustible influence until today in countless ways (Kaylor & Brancato, Ed., 2012). The number of copies, translations, paraphrases, excerpts, and adaptations is legion, and it would be impossible to determine fully a date when this impact might have petered out (Classen, 2018; Classen, 2020), at least in the western world. From a comparative perspective, we might extend our explorations of this early sixth-century philosopher and incorporate Buddhist teachings, for instance, to recognize the true relevance of his messages regarding happiness. We cannot live without some degree of happiness, whatever that might entail in detail, even if it consists only of a form of hope for a better life in the future.

As we learn right from the start in Boethius's treatise, the philosopher finds himself in prison facing the death penalty for trumped-up charges of state treason. While he feels very bitter and distraught about it, Philosophy as an allegorical figure appears and provides him with an extensive teaching which ultimately illuminates the true path toward happiness. Through lengthy dialogues, the two discuss ultimate true meaning of human life, and eventually Boethius, representative for us all, has to learn that life is fundamentally dependent on the workings of Fortune. While most people believe in Fortune, i.e., they pursue wealth, political power, physical prowess and beauty, fame, etc. in order to achieve

happiness, they all have to face the reality of contingency as the only true character of this force. Nothing proves to be stable, reliable, and constant; instead, anyone who would trust the 'gifts' from Fortune would ultimately have to realize that they were given only as loans, whether we think of bodily strength, physical attractiveness, power positions, fame, wealth, and even family life. All those forms of worldly happiness could not be trusted for good, whereas, quite contradictorily, misfortune would finally reveal the true face of Fortune, being determined by contingency. One of the most striking examples proves to be the case of friendship. Only in the case of misfortune would one learn who can be counted as a true friend and who would not be reliable and trustworthy.

Philosophy then proceeds with the real lesson once the actual nature of Fortune has been exposed. Happiness could not rest in any of those worldly, material conditions since they are all fleeting and temporary. Instead, Philosophy defines happiness as the freedom from contingency, the existence of self-reliance, and the complete sense of self-sufficiency, whether we would call this the Supreme Good (*summum bonum*) or God. No human being, however, could claim to possess that power since we are all material in our existence. Nevertheless, as Philosophy then teaches Boethius, once we have realized the need to get beyond the Wheel of Fortune, hence to liberate us from the ever-ruling contingency, then we would be on our way toward this form of self-sufficiency, or true happiness. There exist numerous parallels with ancient Greek philosophy (Socrates) and with the fundamental teachings by Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, both of whom predicated much of their insights on the quest for happiness, though each on his own.

Boethius can be counted as one of the most sophisticated and skillful orators in that regard because he applies also the dialogue and has himself as a speaker constantly challenge Philosophy's arguments, protesting rightfully, so it seems, against the injustice and cruelty of the vile treatment that he received from his enemies. Although he regularly acknowledges that he has learned his lesson, he then reveals that the ultimate statement by Philosophy still appears somewhat inexplicable or too esoteric for him. This then forces Philosophy to explain the phenomenon once again, in a somewhat different manner, drawing from changing metaphors and images to illuminate the central point. This then helps the readers to enter more solidly into the complexity of the argument and to recognize their logic. Ultimately, here we face a glorious philosopher from late antiquity who addressed convincingly some of the most relevant questions in all of human life, the meaning of happiness and ways to acquire it, at least spiritually and mentally.

Most insightfully, Philosophy goes so far as to claim that there is no real evil, as much as evil people appear to exist here on earth. For those who can understand that argument, happiness awaits since this conclusion simply means that all the bad things shed light only on those who really destroy themselves. As we are told, each individual, including all plants, animals, and even rocks, live in order to live, that is, to be to the fullest extent possible what they can be, or what their potentiality implies. All existence is determined by the deep instinct of striving toward the full realization of the self, and this can only be identified with the concept of goodness, or self-sufficiency, the ultimate form of empowerment. Evil

people, however, fight with all their might against this natural drive and thus destroy themselves without fail in the long run.

Philosophy compares those individuals with flowers, for instance, that deliberately seek out shady, cold, dry places where they cannot grow properly, and hence finally die. The same would apply to evil individuals who are so weak that they cannot even allow their natural instinct reach its destiny, of being itself. Hence, there is no evil, only goodness rules. That goodness, however, can be equated with happiness because it entails that at the end the person would need nothing anymore and could join the *summum bonum*, or God. Of course, no one can ever hope to achieve that goal easily here in this life, but our existence is granted to us, like to all other creatures, in order to aim for that goal. Those who understand that principle can finally also grasp the true meaning of happiness, that is, to aim for the good as the essence of all being. Those who aim for evilness, deliberately fight against their own inner self, against the natural drive toward the good, and thus ultimately eliminate themselves.

We could go much further into the philosophy developed by Boethius, but suffices it here to be content with this brief summary, and then to pursue the question further how the discourse on happiness continued throughout the subsequent centuries. My intention is, after all, not to offer an *explication de texte* of the *Consolatio philosophiae* (Classen, 2000), but to demonstrate the extent to which older texts can proffer valuable and timeless insights into fundamental concerns shared by people throughout time and space.

Despite our best intentions and efforts, of course, this ideal of happiness easily escapes our grip, as reality simply teaches us. But this does not diminish the absolute value of happiness, as evanescent as it might be. While Boethius faced the horrible dilemma to make sense out of his imminent execution, despite his protestation that he was completely innocent, subsequent medieval poets explored, for instance, the desire to achieve happiness through love. In fact, many times, high medieval verse narratives illustrate this fundamental drive and the barriers that it met, as wonderfully illustrated by Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan* (ca. 1210), maybe the best medieval version of this pan-European motif. Happiness in love has always constituted one of the highest ideals, and we find excellent examples for this concept particularly in the *lais* by Marie de France.

5. Marie de France

This Anglo-Norman poet from the late twelfth century has already been discussed and examined from many different perspectives. Here I want to reflect on just a few of her *lais* in which she discussed ways for people to achieve happiness in marriage, one of the most important goals in life both then and today. However, in the high Middle Ages, marriages were arranged, and individuals did not enjoy any freedom in that regard. The entire concept of courtly love (at least in lyric poetry) was the result of this phenomenon but it is also mirrored in Marie's narratives (for a comprehensive analysis of her works, see Kinoshita and McCracken 2012). We hear of an unhappily married young lady in "Guigemar," "Yonec," and "Milun," and of adultery in "Equitain" and "Eliduc," while the other *lais* treat more or

less parallel situations treating questions pertaining to how individuals can achieve happiness under difficult circumstances (Marie de France 2018). As Marie indicates throughout her work, challenges exist all the time, and in many cases, the individual is to be blamed for his or her own shortcoming and failure to understand where the true source of happiness lies. Whether she was influenced by Boethius cannot be determined here; there are no direct references to his writing, although the major themes addressed from a variety of perspectives might support this claim, especially because we know of her high level of intellectual education.

In “Guigemar,” for instance, the protagonist meets his future beloved only after a number of miraculous events have taken place. She heals his physical wound but causes a new wound in his heart, love. Unfortunately, they are eventually discovered by her old husband who forces Guigemar to leave. But eventually, the lady can also escape and ultimately reunite with her lover, and both can enjoy their mutual happiness thereupon, which the story no longer addresses. In “Yonec,” the lady is married to a brutal and mean husband, but a falcon man arrives and asks for her love. The two can thus enjoy their happiness, but only for a short time until her husband learns the truth, sets a trap, and can thus kill Yonec. However, she has already conceived a child from him, and many years later, when the family is visiting the monastery with his tomb, the lady calls out to her son revealing the truth of his own history, who then kills his ‘father,’ after his mother has succumbed to her death.

The most complicated situation is described in “Eliduc” where the protagonist is apparently happily married but then falls in love with a British princess whom he brings home despite his marital status. Eventually, his wife realizes that this princess, who has fallen into a coma when she had realized during the crossing of the Channel that her beloved is married, is her husband’s true love. Wisely, she then withdraws from their marriage, establishes a monastery, and lives the rest of her life as its abbess. Many years later, the English princess joins her, while Eliduc enters his own monastery, and all three exchange friendly messages because they have by then dedicated their lives to God (Classen, 2015). In other words, Marie outlines here three stages of happiness in human existence, first, happiness of partnership and friendship in marriage; second, happiness in marital love; and third, happiness in the love for the divine.

In “Milun,” the narrative is predicated on a knight’s long-term wooing of a lady who gets married to another man. Only when he finally is defeated in a tournament by a younger knight, who actually proves to be his own son, he can marry his beloved lady because her old husband has passed away. In “Equitan,” happiness is not achieved because the two lovers fail to control their passion and die a miserable death. In “Lanval,” the protagonist is badly abused by King Arthur and especially the queen who had tried to seduce him and then, because her efforts had failed, accuses him of attempted rape. Only when Lanval’s fairy mistress arrives and rescues him from the false charges, does he escape from his death penalty. However, he is so disgusted about the court that he then rides off with his beloved into the utopian space of Avalon. And in “Bisclavret,” Marie introduces the theme of a man-werewolf who transforms into his horrible shape once every week for three days. Once his wife has learned the

truth, she tries to get rid of him, abandoning him entirely to his existence as a werewolf. At the end, however, he is helped back into his human shape, but not before he has badly punished his wife by biting off her nose. Finally, in “Deux amants” the quest for happiness is also squashed because the jealous father imposes such a harsh challenge on all men who might want to win his daughter’s hand. Only a young squire, whom she loves back with her full heart, succeeds in carrying her up to the top of the mountain without even taking the magical potion her aunt had concocted for him. However, due to his pride and arrogance, which led him to refuse taking the potion, he collapses once he has reached the goal and dies of a broken heart. He is immediately followed by the princess who succumbs to her grief. Marie’s *lai* “Frêne” concludes with a happy outcome, whereas in “Chèvrefeuille,” a direct variation of the *Tristan* story, the two lovers can meet only temporarily in the woods but then have to part again. In “Chaitivel,” four knights woo for a lady’s hand, and in a tournament, three of them kill each other, while the fourth receives a severe wound and becomes impotent. Sorry and happiness permeate all of Marie’s *lais*, and we could claim that her narratives provide literary stages or platforms to explore the many different facets of happiness and unhappiness in love (Classen, 2020).

From here, let us consider one final example from late medieval Germany in which we discover the intriguing combination of the literary discourse with philosophical and religious reflections, all together indicating a surprising way toward humility, self-realization, self-contentment, and hence also happiness.

6. Heinrich Kaufringer

Late medieval literature, whether influenced by Boethius or St. Augustine (354–430) – another one of those late antique intellectual giants – offers many examples of religious, philosophical, or moral-entertaining literature, whether we think of Boccaccio, Petrarch, William Langland, Geoffrey Chaucer, Christine de Pizan, or Johann von Tepl. The South-German poet Heinrich Kaufringer (fl. ca. 1400) is, however, often rather ignored in that context although his verse narratives prove to be extremely provocative, insightful, and forward-looking, offering fascinating perspectives toward the quest for happiness.

As was typical of late medieval literature, Kaufringer experimented with the themes of love, sexuality, anti-Semitism, morality, revenge, women defending themselves against violent and unjust treatment, rationality, alcoholism, evil councilors and lawyers, communication and community. At closer analysis, we can easily recognize the overarching topic of individual happiness within an ethical, spiritual context (Kaufringer, 2014/2019).

The very first story, “The Hermit and the Angel,” which was somehow inspired by Jewish and French sources, as we have learned only recently (Classen, 2017; Classen, 2019), deals with a most unusual theme of a hermit who ventures out into the world in order to observe and experience God’s miracles in His own creation. He is soon accompanied by a stranger whose behavior terribly shocks our poor protagonist. The two men are generously housed by an inn keeper who does not charge them for the

stay and the board. Nevertheless, the stranger kills the host's infant child by suffocating it with a pillow. The second night, the two men are housed once again for free, and the stranger then steal's the host's most valuable chalice. The third night, they receive the worst possible treatment by an inn-keeper who has aligned himself with robbers and murderers, but the stranger then pays him by handing over the chalice. The poor hermit is completely confused and upset, but is helpless in all three situations.

When they are approaching a city and are about to cross the bridge, a young man comes running behind them, but the stranger grabs him and throws him into the river drowning him. This is the last straw for the hermit, who screams out in desperation about the monstrosity of all those four acts. At that moment, however, the other man reveals his true identity; he is an angel sent by God to teach the hermit a lesson about divine justice, in contrast to human justice. He provides meaningful explanations for his actions, seen through the lens of God's purposes, and then he sends the hermit back to his cell and to stop wondering about the meaning of this world: "Therefore, my dear brother, (435) return to your cell, because all the wonders that God does happen only for good purposes. No longer question anything and follow my teachings, (440) which will give you protection for ever" (6).

As frustrating as this outcome might seem to be for the hermit, it clearly signals what the poet wanted to convey to his audience. The quest to understand the true workings of God would be impossible, and all the human desires to learn the secrets of this world would be in vein. When the angel sends the hermit back to his cell with the instruction not to question any further, he also points him into the direction of true happiness, at least in this case. Justice, right and wrong, good and evil, punishment and reward are all matters that can ultimately only be decided or brought about by God. Although the hermit at first had only decided to inspect the world, he was, indirectly, also curious about the causes and reasons of this world. The angel had to set him straight, revealing the ultimate limits to human comprehension. In fact, the hermit accepts those limits for himself and thus gains a sense of happiness he had obviously never known before: "He completed his life dedicated to God and was protected by the throng of angels" (6).

At first sight, modern students might reject the entire verse narrative as too religious, too medieval, or too esoteric to be of any value for modern readers. Critics of the Humanities might feel that this case would perfectly illustrate why we could cut some parts of this wide field, such as Medieval Studies. I am afraid that not too many people within or outside of academia would not object too vehemently, but it would be a tragic loss for society (cf. van Nahl 2022 for the same critical perspective regarding Scandinavian Studies, and this even in Iceland!), as this very narrative and its teaching might illuminate.

Of course, we do not need to engage with the appearance of an angel and the role of a hermit to understand the basic message provided here. We only need to translate slightly some of the components into our own world to gain immediate insights into the relevance of the narrative for the human quest of happiness. The poor hermit faces terrible challenges to his own code of ethics and morality, but he is helpless and has to witness ever more outrageous criminal acts, as he perceives it. At the end, however,

everything he observed turns into the very opposite according to the angel's interpretation, and he is forced to acknowledge that his narrow mind, his simple Christian concepts, cannot cope with the truth behind the stranger's and hence the angel's actions. Justice, after all, constitutes a most elusive ideal, and humans can only aspire for it. As the hermit has to learn, faced by God's direct intervention into this life, humans are barely capable of comprehending the larger schema of things, that is, the world of the divine. Justice as the hermit perceived it amounts to a human concept and is not really compatible with God's justice.

As Kaufringer's narrative thus indicates, the hermit has to accept his fundamental limitations as a human being, so by returning to his cell he really turns away from the attempts to learn the truth behind all worldly matters and conditions. We are not told whether this made him feel happy or content, but there is no doubt that he refrains from then on to search where he would not be able ever to find an answer. He operates almost like the famous Dr. Faustus (*Historia von D. Johann Fausten*, 1587, or Goethe's *Faust*, 1806 and following), but he does not sell his soul to the devil and is simply graced with a divine lesson that sheds a little light on God's working but denies him any further insight. Returning to his cell, the hermit recognizes what he can and what he cannot comprehend, and from then on lives a life of devotion and contentment. However, if he had not left his cell and looked for an answer regarding his question concerning God's working in this world, he would have never understood what limits mean and what the human being is competent enough to investigate and what not. This literary account thus serves as a brilliant illustration of human curiosity and the necessary realization of limits in all epistemological terms.

We could proceed from here and investigate other narratives by Kaufringer, many of which have always deeply challenged my students in their own probing of the critical issues in life. Happiness, as already characterized by Boethius as a philosophical attitude, comes to the fore in many of this poet's other tales, though he tends to criticize human failures and shortcomings through ironic and satirical comments more often than not. One final example, however, allows us to gain a deeper understanding of happiness as outlined by him, "The Search for the Happily Married Couple" (no. 8). In this case, a husband is deeply frustrated with his wife because she is too miserly for his taste, whereas he himself enjoys inviting his friends and entertaining them. So, he abandons her for a couple of years and intends to return only once he would have found a happily married couple.

Tellingly, he is not successful in this regard, although twice he seems to have indeed met a couple that appears to enjoy a perfect marriage. However, in both cases, the respective husband tells him the true secret of his life, lambasting the wife for her adultery and untrustworthiness. The second husband, once he has admitted how much he has been cuckolded, urges the protagonist to return home quickly and to enjoy the life with his wife since her so-called fault would count as nothing compared to the shortcomings of his own wife – extreme nymphomania. The protagonist finally realizes his own shortsightedness, realizes his wife's true virtues, and from then on enjoys a happy companionship with

his wife, compromising with her and achieving thereby a new partnership with her without giving up all of his own interests:

Every good man ought to disregard little shortcomings of his wife if he cannot discover any other blemish in her character except for her miserliness. (500) He should consign himself to it and not cause her any pain or aggravate her because it is the least shortcoming from which a woman might suffer. (505)

Happiness, in other words, is here defined, very similarly as in the case of Boethius's treatise and the *lais* by Marie de France, as a form of humility, modesty, and then also enjoyment of the simple things in life as they are granted each individual. Kaufringer does not suggest to resign to an ascetic lifestyle; to turn away from this world, or to become a completely religious person. He likewise does not belittle the hermit or the foolish husband. Each person learns at the end to live his own life to the best extent possible, acknowledging his personal limits and recognizing his potentials. Happiness results, in other words, from a rational approach to life, from embracing fundamental virtues, and from a pragmatic, realistic worldview. The lessons contained in Kaufringer's verse narratives are not world-shaking, but they are also not irrelevant. Most strikingly, they prove to be relevant even today and have not lost anything of their meaningfulness until the twenty-first century.

7. Conclusion

The quest for happiness continues of course, and there are many other ways of achieving that goal, all depending on an individual's particular interests, skills, potentials, and conditions. Teaching students about any of those three writers from late antiquity, the high and the late Middle Ages, the first writing in Latin, the second in Anglo-Norman, and the third in Middle High German, opens many meaningful perspectives for timeless discussions about what it means to be a human being, aspiring for happiness in a virtuous, philosophically grounded manner. Most of us might not quite achieve that goal, as outlined by Boethius, Marie de France, or Heinrich Kaufringer, for instance, and yet, listening to their comments offers highly meaningful springboards for future explorations of the central issues as they concern us today. Of course, we do not provide for our students specific remedies, strategies, or mechanical advice for a successful life when we teach classes in the Humanities. Instead, we examine discourses, such as the one on happiness as it was pursued throughout time by countless philosophers and poets. And what we achieve through the close reading of the works by those three authors, for instance, consists of opening up perspectives, providing food for thought, innovative ideas, and challenges to our students so that they, through reflecting on those pre-modern messages, learn to engage with the critical sources and comprehend the meaning of the insights developed there, all conveniently packaged in a literary or philosophical framework. I admit that here I face the danger of preaching to the converted, but even the members of the proverbial choir require support, talking points, and clear perspectives, as this paper has tried to develop.

Pursuing those strategies in Humanities classes promises to make available reasonable, rational, cogent, and convincing arguments explaining the central relevance of our field of research and teaching. There is absolutely no reason to despond in face of much public criticism of the Humanities. Instead, studying the works by Boethius, Marie de France, and Heinrich Kaufringer, among many others, illustrates powerfully why we as human beings are deeply dependent on ethical, philosophical, religious, moral, and spiritual concepts to cope in our lives in a meaningful, satisfactory, and fulfilling manner.

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