

# **Dr. Zabel's Prescription for Happiness in the Modern World**

## **Postulates**

1. Happiness consists in engaging in activities, not in acquiring things.
2. Things are sometimes necessary for engaging in activities and so must be acquired for their sake.
3. People have varying talents for and interests in engaging in different kinds of activities.
4. A person learns to engage in activities with some degree of excellence through the guidance of other people.
5. Over the course of your life-span, you will experience periods of vulnerability and disability in which you must depend upon the care of others for physical and psychological survival, and others will experience similar periods of vulnerability and disability in which they must depend upon your care.
6. Because they have finite energy and capacity to concentrate, people are not able to engage in activities continually, but must periodically renew themselves through rest and recreation.
7. Relations of reciprocal care, guidance, learning, collaboration, recreation, and collective decision-making are characteristic of community.
8. It is very difficult or impossible to establish communal

relations between people characterized by deep material inequalities.

## **Theorems**

Therefore, if you want to be happy (and take my word for it, you do):

1. Discover the activities for which you have interest and aptitude, and pursue them with whatever degree of excellence you are capable of.
2. Seek out the people who can guide you in discovering those activities and acquiring the skills necessary to engage in them with excellence.
3. Seek only as much money as is necessary for engaging in such activities, for helping others do so as well, and for caring for them when they experience periods of vulnerability and disability.
4. Cultivate and repair those communal relationships involving family, friends, neighbors, citizens, and human beings in general that play a vital role in sustaining reciprocal care, guidance, learning, collaboration, and recreation.
5. Whenever possible, work with others in establishing those practices of participatory decision-making and rough material equality without which genuine communal relations are very difficult or impossible to achieve.

(I leave it to the reader as an exercise to justify the

postulates and derive the theorems from them. By the way, in doing the latter, you will be deriving prescriptive statements from declarative ones, "ought" statements from "is" statements. Following the eighteenth century Scottish philosopher, David Hume, most modern philosophers have held this to be impossible. But the exercise I've left to you, which is relatively easy to execute, shows that they are wrong in this belief.)

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