

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

By JULIAN CHAMPKIN

THERE are only two questions worth asking in life. The first is: Why are we here? The second is: How can we attain happiness?

The greatest philosophers have applied their minds to both, particularly to the second.

Plato longed for some noble myth that would keep the common run of us happy.

Wittgenstein believed that the happy live in a different world from the rest of us.

Count no man happy until he is dead, said the Greek philosopher Solon, in the ultimate counsel of despair 600 years before Christ.

Meanwhile, in Oxford, England, in 1993, happy and alive (and, on Wednesday nights, kicking, for that is his regular evening for Scottish country dancing) lives Dr Michael Argyle, 67, psychologist and Emeritus Reader in Happiness at Wolfson College.

There he has his Happiness Laboratory where he has been researching his mysterious theme for the past eight years.

Why did he choose to study happiness? One reason, he said, was that the other great theme, misery, had been done. Psychologically, depression is a worked-out seam.

There's nothing left to know. "In any library you'll find 10 shelves of books on depression," Dr Argyle said.

"But there are only three books on happiness; and I've written two of them."

The Psychology of Happiness came out in 1987 and his latest, *The Social Psychology of Everyday Life* has been shortlisted for the European Sociology Prize.

Dr Argyle knows practically all

there is to know about the academic study of happiness.

Happiness is the reward of an active life filled with sweet reason, said Aristotle.

"Well, we don't take too much notice of Aristotle," Dr Argyle said.

"He didn't have statistical control groups."

Dr Argyle does have statistical control groups on happiness or subjective well-being, as the doctors call it.

Statistical control groups comprise people of average happiness who agree to be questioned regularly about their state of mind. It all goes into Dr Argyle's databank.

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Dr Argyle can actually measure happiness on his Oxford Happiness Inventory, which is, in fact, an inverted scale for measuring depression.

Happiness, he said, had three components: First, positive emotions, like joy; second, the absence of negative emotions like anxiety; and finally, the non-emotional component, which means a general, more profound satisfaction with life as a whole.

The biggest single source of happiness, according to Dr Argyle, is a happy marriage, which

his wife Sonia may take as a tribute, since he proclaims himself a very happy man.

The corollary is that the biggest single source of misery is an unhappy marriage.

There are other essentials for a happy life.

Job satisfaction — a feeling that you are doing a useful job, and that you are achieving, or stand a chance of achieving your ambitions.

If you aren't, or can't? Reduce your ambitions to what you can achieve, he advises.

Wealth was one thing many people believed made them happy and they were right, Dr Argyle said.

"The very rich spend 77 per cent of their time being happy; the rest only 62 percent," he said.

"Winning the pools, though, doesn't usually work because it is too sudden.

"It wrecks your way of life. You give up your job, so lose your job satisfaction; you move house, so you lose your friends.

"The ones that are left get jealous, so your relationships go up the spout."

What of worldly success? Are the rich, the powerful and the successful too busy and too stressed to be happy? Not so.

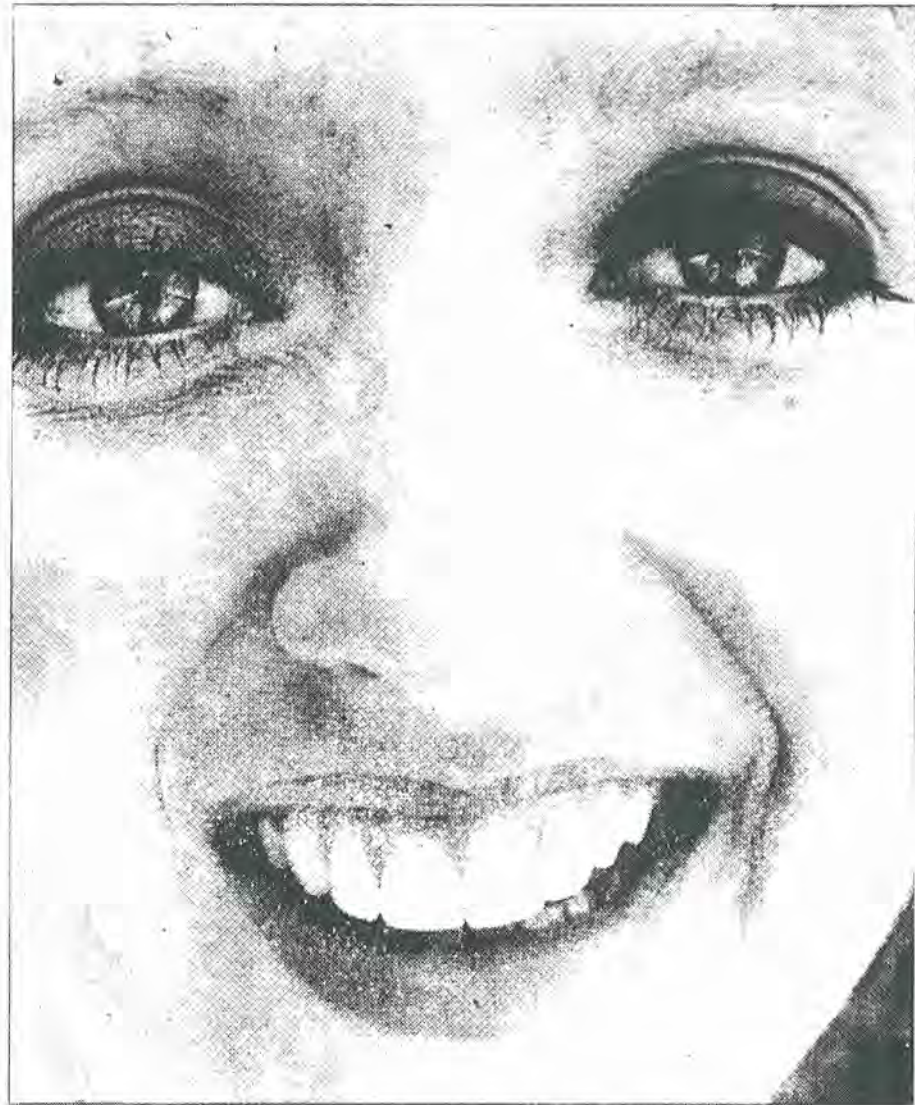
"They have a far higher happiness average than most," Dr Argyle said.

"But in the end," he said, "the most important ingredient of happiness is temperament. There are, quite simply, happy people and sad ones.

"I worked for years on identifying them.

"The happy ones are the extroverts; they are happy because they are more assertive: they smile, so they get smiled at.

"They expect to get on well with everyone, so they do; they



A SMILING face is more likely to be found on a happy, extroverted person.

are convinced that everyone likes them.

"The depressives have no self-esteem, blame themselves for everything that goes wrong. They are convinced that no one likes them.

"Both groups are living in a fool's paradise. The happy people are a lot less popular than they think they are.

"The depressives are a lot less unpopular. But on the whole, the depressives are generally nearer the truth."

Dr Argyle's last piece of advice was a surprise and remarkably down-to-earth for a don.

"There is a pursuit that combines social contact, music, organised fun and a chance to mix with members of the opposite sex," he said.

"These, and the chance to dress up in funny clothes, are much of what it takes for a happy life."

So, as I left, he let me in on his secret.

"Take up Scottish country dancing," he said.

Looking daft in a kilt to the sound of bagpipes? I think I'd rather stay miserable.