

PHIL S-100: HAPPINESS

2017 Yale Summer Session
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We shall explore - historically and analytically - the meanings of happiness and its place in our lives. What is happiness? Have the meanings of happiness changed over time? Is there a necessary connection between happiness and virtue? Is happiness an essentially subjective and/or culturally relative idea? Does it depend on luck? Can and should it be a goal of living? What is its relationship to other goods we value in life - like meaning, freedom, pleasure, goodness and justice? Is happiness “overrated”?

Required Texts

The first two texts are available in the Yale Bookstore (Barnes and Noble). The rest of our readings will be out of a packet from TYCO at 17 Broadway.

1. Belliotti, Happiness is Overrated, Rowman and Littlefield ISBN 074253362X
2. Darrin McMahon, Happiness: A History, Grove ISBN-13: 978-0-8021-4289-4
3. A packet of readings from TYCO at 17 Broadway. Order yours immediately.

Some Interesting Websites

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/category/anxiety/>

This blog – “Anxiety” - sponsored by the New York Times offers personal writing about what makes happiness difficult.

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/category/the-stone/>

“The Stone” is another good blog to follow in The New York Times. It’s devoted to short pieces by and interviews with philosophers.

<http://onbeing.org>

A website based on the weekly National Public Radio show hosted by Krista Tippett. She deals with themes of a “spiritual” (not necessarily theistic) nature, having to do with questions of what makes lives meaningful – and what threatens to drain lives of meaning.

Bigthink <http://bigthink.com/>
Ted <http://www.ted.com/>
Edge <http://www.edge.org/>

Course Requirements

1. **Faithful preparation, class attendance, and participation** in our discussions. Any one absence is equivalent to missing an entire week during a regular, 15-week semester. Unexcused absences will hurt your grade. A pattern of helpful participation in class will help your grade.
2. During the first four weeks of class, you must write **two “posts” (or reading responses) per week**. You may choose which day you skip during weeks 2, 3 and 4. Each response to our readings should develop ideas and raise questions that we can then discuss in class. I’ll show you exemplary posts so you have an idea of what to emulate. **Please send your posts as a WORD attachment directly to me via e-mail at lavog@conncoll.edu**. You should write your post about the next day’s reading assignment, although you may also use it to respond to issues that came up in the previous class. **Your post is due by 10:00 the night before class**.
3. On the last day of class (Friday, 6/30), you must turn in a **portfolio** including both a) your carefully edited 8-10 page **final paper** (approximately 2,500 words) and b) all the **responses you posted** on our website during the semester. Only a complete portfolio will enable me to assess your written work as a whole. I will meet with each of you during the last 2 weeks to talk over your final project with you.
4. On the last day of class (Friday 6/30), you will make a 5-minute **oral presentation** outlining the key issues, ideas and arguments of your final paper.

Elements of a good essay in Philosophy

Richard Kraut, Thomas Nagel, Samuel Scheffler, Pascal Bruckner and Susan Wolf offer fine examples of a well-constructed philosophical essay. You may not agree with their conclusions, but they meet the criteria below.

1. Clear statement of the issue(s) and central thesis.
2. Development of key conceptual distinctions.
3. Use of examples to motivate and/or illustrate the argument.
4. Identification of fundamental premises, reasonable defense of thesis and criticism of alternatives. (To defend an interesting philosophical position, you must be able to imagine others who would disagree with you and explain why they are mistaken.)
5. Organization: brief introduction, main body of the argument, and conclusion.
6. Quality of writing: complete sentences, correct spelling, proper grammar.
7. An important aspect of a good essay is that you **“make the topic your own.”** Sometimes an essay reads like the writer was “going through the motions.” I’m interested in reading an essay that shows you care about the topic: that it grows out of an issue you’re really wrestling with or something rooted in your personal experience in the world. Questions about happiness are at the core of what it means to be human. Try to connect with our questions in your own way.

I. Classical Sources: Philosophy as the Path to a Happy Life

5/29 Introduction: Philosophical Questions about Happiness

- Introducing One Another
- What are Your Philosophical Questions about Happiness?
- Experimental Philosophy: Party Maria vs. Mommy Maria
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPkcOBEuUD0>
- Dan Haybron, “Folk Concepts of Happiness and Well-Being”
- Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine”

5/31 Socrates and Plato: Moral Virtue is Necessary and Sufficient for Happiness

- Plato’s Challenge: Is a Moral Life Necessarily Happier than an Immoral Life?
- Plato, from The Republic, Books II, IV and IX, pp. 3-18
- Paul Bloomfield, “Good to be Bad?”
- Belliotti, Happiness is Overrated, Ch. 1, Sec. 1, pp. 1-11

6/2 Aristotle: Happiness Requires Moral Virtue – and a Little Bit of Luck

- Aristotle, from The Nicomachean Ethics, pp. 19-34
- Charles Taylor, “The Classical Enlightenment: Plato and Aristotle”
- Richard Kraut, “Two Conceptions of Happiness,” pp. 201-221
- Belliotti, Happiness is Overrated, Ch. 1, Sec. 2, pp. 11-19

6/5 Epicureanism: Death and the Way of *Ataraxia* (Freedom from Worry)

- Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus” and “Leading Doctrines”
- Thomas Nagel, “Death” (X)
- Charles Taylor, “The Sting of Death: Why We Yearn for Eternity”
- Samuel Scheffler, “The Importance of the Afterlife. Seriously,” NYT, 9/21/13
- Belliotti, Happiness is Overrated, Ch. 1, Sec. 4, pp. 21-28

6/7 Stoicism: Embracing Your Fate by Way of *Apatheia* (Detachment)

- Epictetus, The Handbook (The Encheiridion)
- Stoicism as a Contemporary Option: A handout based on William Irvine’s A Guide to the Good Life: the Ancient Art of Stoic Joy
- Nancy Sherman, “A Crack in the Stoic’s Armor”
- McMahon, Preface, Intro. and Ch. 1, Happiness: A History, pp. xi-65
- Belliotti, Happiness is Overrated, Ch. 1, Sec. 5, pp. 28-32

6/9 Buddhism: Mindful Presence and the Four Noble Truths

We'll be visited today by Dr. David McCormick, who heads up the Buddhist Meditation Center in New Haven. Dr. McCormick also happens to be the Dorys McConnell Duberg Professor of Neurobiology and Professor of Psychology at Yale and serves as Vice Director, Yale Kavli Institute for Neuroscience!!

- The Buddha: a PBS documentary (113 minutes)
<http://video.pbs.org/video/1461557530>
- Thich Nhat-Hanh, "Froglessness"
- Mattheu Ricard, "A Buddhist View of Happiness"
- Luc Ferry, "A Westerner's Skeptical Take on Buddhism"
- Leszek Kolakowski, "Is God Happy?"

II. Modernity and its Discontents

A. In Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity, **Charles Taylor** writes:

"According to traditional, Aristotelian ethics, 'ordinary life' – the life of production and the family – was important as the necessary background and support to 'the good life' defined by the 'higher' activities of contemplation and citizenship. With the Reformation, we find a modern, Christian-inspired sense that ordinary life was on the contrary the very center of the good life. The life of the God-fearing was lived out in marriage and their calling. The previous 'higher' forms of life were dethroned. And along with this went frequently an attack on the elites who had made these forms their province. (13-14)

By the eighteenth century a new model of civility emerges, in which the life of commerce and acquisition gains an unprecedentedly positive place... The 'bourgeois ethic' has obvious leveling consequences, and no one can be blind to the tremendous role it has played in constituting modern liberal society through the founding revolutions with their ideals of equality, their sense of universal right, their work ethic, and their exaltation of sexual love and the family. The main strands of revolutionary thought – most notably, Marxism – have also exalted man as producer: one who finds his highest dignity in labor and the transformation of nature in the service of life." (214-5)

B. At the end of "Part One: The Making of a Modern Faith" in his book, Happiness: A History, **Darrin McMahan** concludes:

"On the whole, the momentum of modern culture has been in the direction of earthly content, accompanied by a steadily expanding sense of prerogative, entitlement, means and due. Do we not feel today that all human beings, in the best of possible worlds, deserve to be happy? In our lives and in our loves, in our work and in our play, in sickness and in health, happiness draws with omnipresent force, a force that is all the more compelling for our inability ever to clearly conceive it, and its own protean power to shape itself in keeping with our projected desires. As the philosopher Pascal Bruckner

has aptly observed, “happiness has become the sole horizon of our democracies,” a vision that for many is the measure of all things. Whereas for most men and women at the dawn of the modern age, God was happiness, happiness has become our God.”

Rousseau’s belief that a higher happiness could be found here on earth proved to be a stubborn – and very modern faith. But it collided time and again with the hard realities of life in the modern world. Even in those places like the United States, where the pursuit of happiness was treated as an individual responsibility and choice, the end could demand means that threatened to subvert it, transforming the smiling face into a sullen frown. Happiness, we might say, has proved a taskmaster as hard, at times, as the God it sought to replace. (267)

6/12 Modern Bourgeois Happiness and the Specter of “Meaninglessness”

- Darrin McMahon, “What Does the Ideal of Happiness Mean?”
- Pascal Bruckner, “Condemned to Joy”
- Zygmunt Bauman, “Happiness in a Society of Individuals”
- William Deresiewicz, “The End of Solitude”
- Chris Lebron, “The Inheritance of Disaffection”

6/14 Is Happiness Overrated? On the Priority of Meaning over Happiness

- Susan Wolf, “Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life”
- Belliotti, Happiness Is Overrated, Ch. 5, Secs. 4-8, pp. 140-167

6/16 The Positive Psychology Movement and Some Critics

- Doris Iarovici, “The Antidepressant Generation”
- Tal ben-Shahar, 29-minute video from website BigThink - <http://bigthink.com/ideas/16653>
- “10 Ingredients in Positive Psychology’s Recipe for Happiness” (X)
- Eric G. Wilson, “In Praise of Melancholy” (X)
- Barbara Ehrenreich, “Pathologies of Hope” (X)
- Adam Phillips, “A Psychoanalyst’s View of Happiness Addiction” (X)
- Peter Salovey, “Yale Convocation Address, 2007” (X)

6/19 Cognitive Science and Pixar’s Inside Out

- View Inside Out (2015): 95 minutes.
- Dacher Keltner and Paul Ekman, “The Science of Inside Out” (X)
- Antonia Peacocke and Jackson Kernion, “Two Philosophers Explain What Inside Out Gets Wrong about the Mind” (X)

- Daniel Kahneman, “The Riddle of Experience versus Memory”
http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_kahneman_the_riddle_of_experience_vs_memory.html
- Daniel Gilbert, “Why are We Happy – or Not?”
http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_asks_why_are_we_happy.html
- Paul Bloom, “The Long and Short of It” (X)

6/21 Happiness and the Stages of Life:

Erik Erikson and Ingmar Bergman’s Wild Strawberries

- View Ingmar Bergman’s classic film, Wild Strawberries (1955): 91 minutes.
- Erik Erikson, “Reflections on Dr. Borg’s Life Cycle” (X)
- Jesse Kalin on Bergman and the “embedment” of our lives (X)
- Joseph Epstein, “The Symphony of Life”

6/23 Deconstructing the Promise of Happiness: What Does Happiness Do?

- Mike Martin, “Paradoxes of Happiness”
- Sara Ahmed, “Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness”

6/26 Perspectives on that “One Thing”: Happiness

- View Jill Sprecher’s film: 13 Conversations about One Thing (2001): 104 minutes.
- Recommended - Todd Restler, “Thirteen Conversations about One Thing: An Appreciation”
<http://www.sheilaomalley.com/?p=35045>

6/28 Art, The Creative Process and Happiness

- A discussion with a guest artist – poet Maya Pindyck - on the meanings of happiness in her work and life.

6/30 Our Final Day

- Presentation of your final paper to the class. And fare well!!

Final approximately 8-10 page paper (approximately 2,500 words) due on the final day of class. No late papers will be accepted. All work must be completed on June 30, 2017.