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.

3. A packet of readings from TYCO at 17 Broadway. Order yours immediately.

**Some Interesting Websites**


*Personal writing about what makes happiness difficult.*


*Short pieces by and interviews with philosophers.*

- Philosophy Bites [http://philosophybites.com](http://philosophybites.com)
- Brain Pickings [https://www.brainpickings.org](https://www.brainpickings.org)
- Ted [https://www.ted.com/talks?topics%5B%5D=happiness](https://www.ted.com/talks?topics%5B%5D=happiness)
- Edge [http://www.edge.org/](http://www.edge.org/)
- On Being [http://onbeing.org](http://onbeing.org)

*On Being is a weekly NPR 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.*

**Course Requirements**

1. **Faithful preparation, class attendance, and participation** in our discussions. Because we only have 15 meetings, any one absence is equivalent to missing an entire week during a
regular, 15-week semester. Absences for which there isn’t a very good excuse 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” (i.e., reading responses) per week. Each post should be at least 500 words (approximately 3 paragraphs or 2 double-spaced pages). You must post for Wednesday (on Plato) and Friday (on Aristotle) during our first week. You may choose which day you skip during weeks 2, 3 and 4. See below for what I expect from your posts.

Please use Canvas for the purpose of posting. But, in the event of difficulties with Canvas, you can always send your posts as a WORD attachment directly to me via e-mail at lavog@conncoll.edu. Be sure to put your name on the title line of your post! 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 P.M. the night before class.

3. On the last day (Friday, 8/2), 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 (Friday 8/2), you will make a 5-minute oral presentation outlining the key issues, ideas and arguments of your final paper.

What do I expect from your POSTS?

Posts will help you prepare well for our class discussions and warm you up for your longer papers. The best structure for a post involves the following steps:

1. Identify a thesis that one of our authors puts forward (e.g., Plato believes that x…).
2. Explain the reasons why s/he believes this thesis.
3. Raise an objection to the author’s thesis or her defense of it.
4. If you have time, propose your own thesis and explain why you believe it. (But this is a lot to ask for in a short post.)

A post can serve several functions. It can help you:

1. Dissect the argument presented in a reading: breaking it down into premises and conclusions.
2. Critically evaluate the argument of the reading. (This presupposes that you understand the argument.)
3. Raise questions about what you don’t understand in the reading.
4. Make connections with other readings or things you are encountering in other courses.
5. Personalize our material by connecting it with your life.
6. Use examples to illustrate (and breathe life into) your points.
Once again, each post should be at least **500 words** (approximately 3 paragraphs or 2 double-spaced pages). You can’t do everything in such a small space. So pick your shots and decide just what you want to accomplish in your post. Don’t just make off-handed remarks, but try to develop your points. Use your post to be sharp, polemical and provocative, if you wish, but you must make arguments and give your reasons.

**EDIT your entry before you post it!!!!** Each post is due by 10 P.M. the night before the class for which you post. LATE POSTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AS I NEED TIME TO READ THEM BEFORE CLASS.

Keep a copy of each of your posts, as I expect you to turn them in as part of your portfolio at the end of the semester. Though I will not grade them individually (hoping that this frees you up to feel creative), I shall look at your posts as part of your portfolio, and your grade will be affected by their overall quantity and quality.

**What do I expect from your FINAL PAPER?**

Your final paper should have the same structure that I recommend for your posts: identify a thesis or claim about happiness that at least one author has made, explain why they believe it, subject it to critical examination, and conclude with a thesis of your own and a defense of it. In your 2,500 word final paper you’ll have more room to develop your argument than you did in your posts.

**Elements of a GOOD ESSAY in Philosophy**

Among the authors we read, Paul Bloomfield, 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.
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

7/1 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
- Plato’s Challenge: Is a Just Life Necessarily Happier than an Unjust Life?

7/3 Socrates and Plato: Moral Virtue is Necessary and Sufficient for Happiness

- Plato, from The Republic, Books II, IV and IX, pp. 3-18
- Raymond Belliotti, Happiness is Overrated, Ch. 1, Sec. 1, pp. 1-11
- Paul Bloomfield, “Good to be Bad?”

7/5 Aristotle: Happiness Requires Moral Virtue – and a Little Bit of Luck

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

7/8 Epicureanism: Death and the Way of Ataraxia (Freedom from Worry)

- Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus” and “Leading Doctrines”
- Belliotti, Happiness is Overrated, Ch. 1, Sec. 4, pp. 21-28
- 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

7/10 Stoicism: Embracing Your Fate by Way of Apatheia (Equanimity)

- Epictetus, The Handbook (The Encheiridion)
- Belliotti, Happiness is Overrated, Ch. 1, Sec. 5, pp. 28-32
- 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
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 McMahon 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)

7/15 The Modern Enlightenment: Bourgeois Happiness – and Disillusionment

- Read quotations above by Charles Taylor and Darrin McMahon
- John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, brief selection in packet
- Bernard Reginster, “Happiness as a Faustian Bargain”
- Bellioti, Happiness is Overrated, Ch. 2, Secs. 3 and 4, pp. 53-61

7/17 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”

7/19 Is Happiness Overrated? On the Priority of “Meaning” over Happiness

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

7/22 Love and Happiness: Is it True that “Love Makes the World Go ‘Round”?

- Susan Wolf, “The Importance of Love”
- Hi Phi podcast: “A Better Love” (47 minutes)
  o https://hiphination.org/complete-season-one-episodes/episode-10-a-better-love/
- Alain de Botton, “Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person”
- Recommended: 8 Great TED Talks about Love – Try one!!
  o https://www.ted.com/playlists/202/talks_that_just_might_save_you
III. Contributions from Contemporary Psychology and Art

7/24 The Positive Psychology Movement and Some Critics

- Peter Salovey, “Yale Convocation Address, 2007” (X)
- 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)
- Doris Iarovici, “The Antidepressant Generation”

7/26 What is it to be “Satisfied with My Life”?  

- Daniel Gilbert, “Why are We Happy – or Not?” http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_asks_why_are_we_happy.html
- Jennifer Mulnix, “Satisfied with What?” (X)

7/29 Cognitive Science and Pixar’s Inside Out

- Dacher Keltner and Paul Ekman, “The Science of Inside Out” (X)
- Jefferson Singer, “Self-Defining Memories” from Memories that Matter

7/31 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.  
  - Available on: https://yale.kanopy.com/welcome/frontpage
- 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” (X)

8/2 Our Final Day: Presentation of your final paper to the class. And fare well!!
Your portfolio - 8-10 page paper (approximately 2,500 words) plus copy of your posts - due on the final day of class. No late papers will be accepted.

All work must be completed and turned in on 8/2/18.