Philosophy 220: Philosophy of Happiness

Regents Professor Julia Annas.

MWF 1 – 1.50 pm. Chavez 301.

The course has a D2L website, where all the readings are to be found.

My office is Social Science Building 123. Office hours TBA. The Philosophy Department office is Social Sciences Building 213.

Why happiness?

Happiness matters! There are large numbers of self-help books telling us how to be happy. Some nations are planning to measure the happiness of their citizens to find out how it can be increased. There is a huge field of ‘happiness studies’, and focus on happiness in positive psychology as well as politics and law. Much of this is confusing, since it’s often not clear what the authors think happiness is. Is it feeling good? Is it having a positive attitude to the way you are now? Is it having a positive attitude to your life as a whole? Is it having a happy life? How can some people advise others on how to be happy?

Philosophers have explored happiness, and our search for happiness, for two thousand years. They have asked what happiness is, and have developed different answers, including some now being rediscovered.

In this course we will ask what happiness is, and look at major answers. We’ll look at rich philosophical traditions of thinking about happiness, and also at some recent work in the social sciences. We’ll examine the contributions being made to the ongoing search to find out what happiness is, and how we can live happy lives.

Course Readings

Course readings will be available on the D2L site. You are expected to do the reading before the class it is assigned for, as we will be discussing it. There will be handouts. You are encouraged to take notes on them.

There are hundreds of books with Happiness in the title. I recommend two, both paperback (they are not required for the course):

- Nicholas White, A Brief History of Happiness, Blackwell Publishing.
Course requirements

Attendance, discussion and quizzes will count for 20% of the grade.
The first part of the course will have two tests (on Fridays), 15% each = 30%.
The second part of the course will have a 2-3 page paper, 15%
The third part will have a 2-page paper, 15%
The final will require essay answers to questions, 20%

Policy on grading

I am always happy to discuss your grade. If you want to challenge the grade, do so in writing and give it to me with the original piece of work. I will read both, and we can discuss them. This may, but need not, lead to an adjustment of the grade, depending on the merits of your case.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is a serious offence. It is an offence against the author whose ideas the plagiarist is stealing, against the professor whom the plagiarist is trying to cheat and against all the other members of the class, over whom the plagiarist is trying to get an unfair advantage. A student proved (after all proper procedures have been followed) to have plagiarized, or to have cheated in other ways, will receive a failing grade for the course.

You are expected to have familiarized yourself with the UA Code of Conduct on the following site: http://advising.arizona.edu/codes_of_conduct
Review the following websites on how to avoid plagiarism:
http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html
http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/academicintegrityforstudents

TurnItIn.com

All papers for this course will submitted through TurnItIn.com, a plagiarism-prevention program. You must set up an individual account with TurnItIn.com for this class (unless you already have one from previous classes).

Laptop use is not allowed in class

I will show you a Scientific American study which shows how taking notes on laptops actually stops you engaging with the class material. Taking notes by hand is a way of engaging the material mentally and helps you learn. There will be paper handouts for each class and you are encouraged to take notes on these.
You are expected to arrive on time and refrain from leaving till the end of class, to behave appropriately at all times and to treat others in class with respect.

Office Hours and Email

Email does not replace individual discussion in office hours. If you need to consult me, come to office hours. Do not email me with queries that can be answered by consulting the syllabus. If you skip a class, do not email me asking me to tell you the content of the class! Ask someone else in the class. Use the class as an opportunity to find friends to study with.

If you are not sure how you should email a professor, read one of the many sites on the web about Etiquette for Emailing Professors.

Students with Disabilities

If you need accommodations, you need to register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) so that they can send me official notification of your accommodation needs, especially for exams. The DRC is at 621-3268, and http://drc.arizona.edu

Citation

You may use any citation style (eg Chicago Manual of Style). Read the following for proper research and citation methods: http://www.library.arizona.edu/search/research-writing/index.html

How to write a philosophy paper

The following websites are very useful, especially if you have not written many philosophical papers:
http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html
http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~phildept/files/ShortGuidetoPhilosophicalWriting.pdf

Using the internet

Websites on philosophers are highly unreliable, and sometimes awful. Many contain mistakes and/or bizarre views. Avoid Wikipedia on philosophers! Use the Stanford Online Encyclopedia, which is written by outstanding philosophers, well-edited and frequently updated (http://plato.stanford.edu). Websites on happiness are of every kind, some helpful, some eccentric. Don’t rely on these websites for reliable information.

Syllabus: Study the readings for a given class before the class, as it will be basis for our discussion in class.
Monday and Wednesday sessions will have a basically lecture format (with some videos, powerpoint etc.) with questions for clarification. Friday sessions will be discussion of the material from Monday and Wednesday. I will be particularly strict about recording attendance on Fridays, since discussion of the material and engagement with it are a central part of any philosophy course.

**Wednesday January 11:** First day of class: introduction to the course.

**Friday January 13:** No class, since we have no material to discuss yet.

**Philosophical accounts of happiness.**

You may have assumed that happiness is pretty obvious, but once you think about it you can see that our assumptions about happiness are often confused. A good way to think more clearly about happiness is to look at some different philosophical accounts, since there is a rich philosophical tradition of thinking about happiness.

By Friday January 20th write a one-page account of what you think happiness is. Be sure to put your name on it, and hand it in on Friday. This will not be graded, but will be returned to you at the end of the course, for you to reflect on what you’ve learned about happiness.

**Monday January 16: MLK Day: no class**

**Wednesday January 18:** Aristotle talks about our intuitive understanding of our final end in life, what we are pursuing in whatever we do. Is this happiness? We will see that it is one compelling account of it. Read Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1 (minus chapter 6 and chapter 12 and 13) on D2L.

**Friday January 20:** Discussion.

**Monday January 23:** Aristotle on virtue and character, and their relation to happiness.

**Wednesday January 24:** Aristotle on friendship and the place of others in friendship.

**Friday January 27:** Discussion

**Monday January 30:** Epicurus. Readings from Inwood and Gerson, *The Epicurus Handbook.* (On D2L.)

**Wednesday February 1:** Epicurus. Julia Annas, ‘Epicurus on Pleasure and Happiness.’ (On D2L.)

**Friday February 3:** Discussion

Bentham marks the beginning of an entirely new tradition, in which happiness is taken to be *pleasure*, and pleasure is taken to be an obvious *feeling*, which is the same whatever its source, and which can be measured.

Wednesday February 8: More on Bentham

Friday February 10: Discussion


These two contemporary thinkers defend a position like Bentham’s.

Wednesday February 15: More on Layard and Tansjo

Friday February 17: Discussion


Mill argues that Bentham’s idea of happiness is too narrow, and tries to expand it and render it more acceptable to us, while still maintaining that happiness is, in the end, pleasure. Do you think he succeeds? If not, why not?

Wednesday February 22: More on Mill

Friday February 24: Discussion


Friday March 3: Discussion

Wednesday March 8: In-class exam.

Friday March 10: Discussion.

Saturday March 11-Sunday March 19: SPRING BREAK
Contemporary theories of happiness. In recent years many social psychologists have produced studies of happiness. But can happiness be measured? How good are the suggested techniques for measuring it? What are the reasons for taking happiness to be important for social policy? Does this kind of concern with happiness presuppose that happiness is a valuable social good? If so, can it just be a matter of feeling good? We will look at studies by social psychologists in the light of the distinctions we’ve seen.


Friday March 24: Discussion.

Monday March 27: Is some proportion of your life already determined as to how happy you can become? Sonja Lyubomirsky, ‘Happiness Set-Point,’ from her book The How of Happiness. (On D2L). Also, we’ll take the short free course on happiness from her website.

Wednesday March 29: Can the results of happiness studies be used to shape public policy? Derek Bok, ‘What Investigators Have Discovered,’ from The Politics of Happiness. On D2L.

Friday March 31: Discussion. Topics for your 2-3 page paper on happiness studies will be put on D2L.

Monday April 3: Martha Nussbaum, ‘Who is the happy warrior? Philosophy poses questions to psychology,’ in Eric Posner and Cass Sunstein (eds), Law and Happiness, 81-113. On D2L. This brings together different objections to conclusions currently being drawn from empirical work in happiness studies, and argues that the field needs more conceptual clarity. Nussbaum draws on the Wordsworth poem The Happy Warrior to claim that happiness is a matter of character rather than just feeling.

Wednesday April 4: More on Nussbaum.

Friday April 7: Discussion. Your 2-3 page paper on happiness studies is due.
Happiness and being a good person.

In the final part of the course we will look at an issue of constant interest. What is the relation between being a good person and leading a happy life? We can appreciate by now that the answer to this will be confused if we don’t take into account the different understandings of happiness that we have been exploring. This is the part of the course in which you can reflect on what you have learnt about happiness.

Monday April 10: We will watch the movie Crimes and Misdemeanors.

Wednesday April 12: Crimes and Misdemeanors continued.

Friday April 14: Discussion of the movie. The movie sets up a question: what’s the relation between being happy and being a good person?


Wednesday April 19: We will start to look at ‘True Happiness: the Role of Morality in the Folk Conception of Happiness’. On D2L. Topics for your 2-page paper on happiness and morality will be put on D2L.

Friday April 21: Discussion.

Monday April 24: More on ‘True Happiness’.

Wednesday April 26: Review of this part of the course. Your 2-page paper on happiness and morality due.

Friday April 28: Discussion.

Monday May 1: Review of the class as a whole. You will get back the accounts of happiness you handed in at the start of the semester. Do you still agree with what you wrote then? Whether you agree or not, you will have discovered that happiness is complex.

Wednesday May 3: Final class (optional).

FINAL EXAM Monday May 8, 1–3 pm, usual classroom. Do not make travel arrangements which conflict with this. No make-ups will be given. 4 questions will be made available on D2L on Friday May 5, and the exam will consist of 2 of these.