

# Topics in Applied Ethics/Topics in Philosophical Psychology

# Happiness

Syllabus v. 1.0

**Philosophy 632/652, Fall 2012**

Catalog #9044/#9055

Wed 5:45-8:35, SS 116

<http://profron.net/happiness>

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**Course Description:** The theme of this seminar is *happiness*. Most people hope to attain happiness, and philosophers from Aristotle to Mill have regarded happiness as the *summum bonum*, the highest good. But what is happiness? How is it related to notions of satisfaction, contentment, joy, pleasure, good fortune, and well-being? Does happiness consist in ridding oneself of desire, as the Stoics maintained? Or in the satisfaction of one's desires? Is happiness epistemically privileged, or can one be wrong about whether one is happy? What is the connection, if any, between happiness and goodness or virtue? Can a wicked person who gets what he wants be considered happy? What are the connections between happiness and rationality? Can someone who is deluded be considered happy? And is happiness central or relatively unimportant to the notion of a life worth living? These are some of the questions we will be exploring as we consider happiness and its implications for ethical theory. We will also be looking at recent empirical work in psychology for the light it sheds on the philosophical questions. Questions here will include these: Are desire-satisfaction theories of happiness undermined by research that seems to imply that getting what one wants does not always lead to happiness? Is concern for others (altruism) connected with subjective well-being? Can contemporary neuroscience shed light on what the states of happiness really are in us, and help us encourage and enhance them? Is there a "dark side of happiness," and can a person can be "too happy"? Is true happiness is even achievable for human beings?

**Readings:** The actual readings for the seminar will be determined partially on the fly, in a react-and-improvise way. Approximately 50-100 pages of reading each week. You are required to have done all the reading, and be prepared to discuss it in class.

- Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness*. Vintage, 2007.
- Cahn & Vitrano (eds), *Happiness*. Oxford University Press, 2008. ("C&V" in outline below)
- Further recommended texts:
  - Sissela Bok, *Exploring Happiness: From Aristotle to Brain Science*. Yale U. Press, 2010.
  - James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance*. Oxford University Press 1986 (paperback 1989).
  - L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, & Ethics*. Oxford University Press 1996

## Requirements:

- A very short (1-2) page essay each week on a topic posted on the course page (50%), and a term paper (50%). The short essays will provide the basis for discussion.
- Participation in class and on the course discussion board is expected, and can help your grade; lack of participation can hurt it.
- You will create your own topic for the term paper, but it must be (1) related to the course and (2) approved by us. You will submit a topic, preliminary bibliography, an outline, a first draft, and a final version on the dates indicated below. Length: 15-20 pages.
- Further Academic Policies
  - Attendance: Mandatory.
  - Incompletes: In accordance with university rules, a grade of "I" will be given only when, due to unavoidable circumstances, a student who has done most of the work is unable to complete the course.
  - Academic dishonesty: Plagiarism – passing off someone else's work as your own – will result in your failing the course. Please consult the University guidelines.

**Course outline:** (Very loose estimate; actual rate depends on amount of discussion generated, etc.)

**Aug. 29: Introduction and overview**

- Nozick, "Happiness" (posted)

**Sept. 5 : First Passes at Psychology and Happiness**

- Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness*, chaps. 1-3
- C&V Introduction, ix-xi

**Sept. 12: Happiness as Pleasure: Hedonism**

- Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" and "Leading Doctrines" (pp. 37-40 in C&V)
- Bentham, from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (pp. 99-103 in C&V)
- Mill, from *Utilitarianism* (pp. 121-143 in C&V)
- Haybron, "Why Hedonism is False" (pp. 173-179 in C&V)
- Nozick's "Happiness", from *Philosophical Explanations* (posted)

**Sept. 19: Happiness and virtue**

- Annas, "Virtue and Eudaimonism" (pp. 245-261 in C&V)
- Cahn and Murphy, "Happiness and Immorality" (first two sections) (pp. 262-264 in C&V)
- Plato, from *The Republic* (pp. 3-18 in C&V)
- Aristotle, from *Nicomachean Ethics* (pp. 19-34 in C&V)
- Hume, "The Sceptic" from *Essays, Moral and Political* (pp. 86-99 in C&V)

**Sept. 26: No class, Yom Kippur**

**Oct. 3: Happiness as subjective well-being**

- Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness*, chapters 4-6
- Sumner, (2000) "Something in Between" (posted)
- Railton, "Subjective Well-Being as Information and Guidance" (posted)

**Oct. 10: Happiness and satisfaction**

- Seneca, from *On the Happy Life* (pp. 41-51 in C&V)
- Kekes, "Happiness" (pp. 179-193 in C&V)
- Kraut, "Two Conceptions of Happiness" (pp. 201-22 in C&V)
- Annas, "Happiness as Achievement" (pp. 238-245 in C&V)

**Oct 17-24: Are people the best judges of their own happiness?**

- READINGS TBA

**Oct. 31: Is happiness achievable /central to a good life?**

- READINGS TBA

**Nov. 7: Implications for public policy (outline of term paper due)**

- Madison Powers and Ruth Faden, "Essential Dimensions of Well-Being" and "Capabilities, Functioning, and Well-Being," (posted)
- World Happiness Report (posted)

**Nov. 14: Catch up (and first draft of term paper due)**

**Nov. 21: No class, Thanksgiving**

**Nov. 28-Dec. 5: Presentations of term papers**