



**Ethics: Happiness and
Philosophical Inquiry
PHIL 125-01**

**Fall 2010
MWF 1:10-2:10**

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Course Description

In this first year course we are going to immerse ourselves in a number of years of philosophical thought about happiness. The goal is to let philosophical questions about happiness serve as a wide-angle lens through which you can gain three things. The first is some insight into questions philosophers ask about happiness and their responses to these questions. The second is a greater understanding of the dimensions of philosophy as an activity—or what it is to “do philosophy”—beginning with the formation of a philosophical question and arriving at the structured presentation of philosophical ideas. The third is an increased capacity for close reading, innovative and critical thinking, written expression, and the use of library and internet resources in support of your research.

Long ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle defined happiness as the best and ultimate goal of human existence. But was he right? What role does happiness

play in the good life? Is there a relationship between happiness and ethical action, between being happy and being good? What are some reasons for thinking there might not be such a relationship? Is it possible to design one's life so as to maximize one's chances for being happy? Is happiness even attainable? And what do we mean when we talk about "happiness" anyway? At the center of our exploration of these questions will be three approaches to normative ethical theory that have played a key role in the development of ethics within the Western philosophical tradition: virtue-based ethics (as represented by Aristotle), consequentialism (as represented by Bentham and Mill), and deontological ethics (as represented by Kant). Complementing our exploration will be other readings in the history of philosophy as well as contemporary work on happiness both by and influenced by philosophers, including work drawn from the emerging field of happiness studies. We will conclude the course by further opening the aperture of our reflection to consider some questions related to happiness and morality with respect to non-human animals and robots.

Learning goals

There are multiple learning goals for this course, organized around the themes of substance, skills, and self-awareness.

With respect to substance, this course is designed to help you acquire a critical understanding of: (a) philosophical Q&A—questions and answers/arguments—related to happiness; (b) three major traditions within normative ethical theory: virtue ethics, consequentialism, and deontological ethics; and (c) contemporary work on happiness by and influenced by philosophers.

This course is also intended to help you develop key skills associated with philosophy in particular and the liberal arts in general. By the end of this semester, you should (a) be able to read and analyze philosophical writing with an inquisitive and thoughtful mind; (b) be more experienced in "doing" philosophy, including forming philosophical questions and constructing philosophical lines of thought; (c) be more adept in your writing; and (d) know how to use the library and the internet to support your philosophical explorations.

Self-awareness as a philosophical learning goal has its roots in Socrates' dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living." I hope this course will expand your own capacities for (a) ethical reasoning; (b) understanding what assumptions and predispositions you bring to the consideration of ethical questions; and (c) respecting well-reasoned views even when they disagree with your own. I also

hope it will help you to see the positive value of being confused and inspire you to take risks in your own thinking.

Required Texts

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated and edited by Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe. Oxford University Press, 2002. ISBN: 978-0198752714.

Cahn, S. and Vitrano, C. *Happiness: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0195321401.

Gilbert, D. *Stumbling on Happiness*. Vintage Books, 2006. ISBN: 978-1400077427.

Heybron, D. *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being*. Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0199545988.

Articles on library e-reserve

Recommended Reading

White, N. *A Brief History of Happiness*. Blackwell, 2006. ISBN:9781405115209.

Academic Integrity

In reviewing your work, I will adhere to the College's *Academic Integrity Policy* as published in the *Student Handbook*.

Through the gift of your attention, you also help support the integrity of the academic environment. For your own sake and for the sake of others when we are in class together please refrain from texting, tweeting, and the like.

Coursework

For this course, you will be writing three 5-7 page papers, and complete and present a group research project on a philosophical question related to happiness.

In the first paper you will be asked to respond to Daniel Gilbert's *Stumbling on Happiness*. In the second paper you will be asked to write on topic related to our readings on normative ethical theory. The third paper (due at the time of the final exam) will invite you to present and defend your own view on a question related to happiness and ethical theory. More information, including a list of suggested topics for the second paper, will be available in class.

You will get your first and second papers back with a penciled-in grade and comments on both content and expression. You will then be expected to revise your paper and turn in a final version. The final version will be due one week after you get back the comments on your drafts.

Late papers will be accepted without penalty if you have a good reason for turning it in late and you let me know *in advance*. *Unexcused first paper drafts and final versions, and unexcused second paper drafts, will be accepted up to one week after the due date, but you will lose half a grade (e.g. A- to B+) on the first day your paper is later, and every two days thereafter. Unexcused second papers may not be resubmitted for an improved grade.*

For the group research project, you will be divided into teams of three to come up with a happiness-related question, related to our readings in ethical theory, and a proposal for how it might be tested. (You won't have to actually run an experiment or conduct a survey.) In your write-up of your project, you'll be asked to consider why you believe the question is interesting and worth considering and to describe and comment on research (if any) related to the question you select. At the end of the semester, each group will get 30 minutes to present their project and answer questions about it.

Coursework evaluation

Your final grade for this class will be based on the following percentages:

First paper	20%
Second paper	20%
Third paper	20%
Group research project	30% (including 10% for oral presentation)
Class participation	10%

By "class participation" I mean active engagement during class meetings: raising questions, taking part in discussions, etc. In this context, it is not how often you speak but what you say that matters.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Paper Due Dates

Please come to class meetings prepared to talk about the reading assignment for that particular day. Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and e-mailed to the class distribution list.

Week One

8 September	Happiness and Robert Nozick's experience machine Cahn and Vitrano (CV), pp. 236-237
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10 September	The desire-satisfaction theory of happiness; introduction to Aristotle. Begin reading Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> in CV , pp.19-23.
Week Two	Virtue ethics: Aristotle
13 September	Book I, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (NE) ,pp. 95-110; introduction to Books III and IV, NE , pp. 17-34.
15 September	Book II in CV , pp. 23-27 (middle of page); Book III in NE , pp. 132-141.
17 September	Class discussion of <i>Stumbling on Happiness</i>
Week Three	
20 September	Book IV in NE , pp. 141-158
22 September	Book VIII and IX in NE , pp. 57-65, 208-218, 236-241.
24 September	Today we will gather in the library's instruction room (2 nd floor) for an introductory session in library research.
Week Four	
27 September	Book X in NE , pp. 74-81, 241-254
29 September	In class, we will look at a sampling of work in happiness studies. First Paper Due
1 October	No class meeting. Use the time to think about your group question for your research project.
Week Five	Contemporary reflections on virtue ethics
4 October	Peter S. Wenz, "Synergistic Environmental Virtues: Consumerism and Human Flourishing" (on e-reserve)
6 October	Julia Annas, "Happiness as Achievement," CV , pp. 238-244
8 October	Richard Taylor, "Virtue Ethics," CV , pp. 222-235
Week Six	The ethics of duty: Kant
11 October	...but first, for the sake of background...some David Hume, "The Skeptic," CV , pp. 86-99.
13 October	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Section I, CV , pp. 104-108

15 October More discussion of work in happiness studies. We will read and talk about an article by M. Steger (a Mac grad), TB Kashden, and S. Oishi, "Being good by doing good: Daily eudaimonic activity and well-being" (2008). You will find this on e-reserve in the library.

Week Seven

18 October Kant, Section II, CV, pp. 108-112

20 October Kant, Section II, CV, pp. 108-112, cont'd.

22 October Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," p.556-561

Week Eight

Consequentialist ethics: Bentham and Mill

25 October Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, CV, pp.99-103

27 October John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, CV, Chapter II, pp.121-133
Group research project questions and preliminary bibliography due

29 October Fall break—no class meeting

Week Nine

1 November Mill, CV, Chapter III, pp.134-139

3 November Mill, CV, Chapter IV, pp.139-143

5 November **Contemporary reflections on utilitarianism**
Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," (on e-reserve)
Second Paper Due

Week Ten

8 November Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (on e-reserve)

10 November Singer, cont'd

12 November Happiness Studies discussions continue. I hope we will be able to watch and talk about one of the presentations at the happiness conference at St. Ben's/St. John's earlier this term.

Week Eleven

15 November Can immoral people be happy? A view from both sides
Stephen Cahn & Jeffrie Murphy, "Happiness and Immorality," CV, pp.261-266

17 November	Contemporary philosophical scholarship on happiness Daniel Haybron, <i>The Pursuit of Unhappiness</i> , Part I, pp.3-42
19 November	Haybron, Part II, pp.79-91; 142-151
Week Twelve	
22 November	Heybron, Part IV, pp.225-251
24 November	Haybron, Part IV, pp.253-279
26 November	Thanksgiving break--no class meeting
Week Thirteen	
29 November	Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Intelligence of Dolphins" (on e-reserve)
1 December	Marc Bekoff, "The Public Lives of Animals: A Troubled Scientist, Pissy Baboons, Angry Elephants, and Happy Hounds"
3 December	Selection from Wendell Wallach and Collin Allen, <i>Moral Machines: Teaching Robots Right from Wrong</i> (on e-reserve)
Group Projects Due	
Week Fourteen	
6 December	Group project oral presentations
8 December	Group project oral presentations
10 December	Group project oral presentations
Week Fifteen	
13 December	We will wrap up the course by looking at Julie Annas's article contrasting ancient and modern concepts of happiness: "Virtue and Eudaimonism," <i>CV</i> , pp.245-261
17 December	Please turn in your final papers to me in my office during our final exam time, 1:30-3:30 pm

