

Happiness: East and West

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Course Description

This course focuses on a fundamental question that has been intensely scrutinized by philosophers: what is the nature of the good (or happy) life? To investigate this question we will critically examine the various accounts of happiness (sometimes labeled ‘well-being’) that have been proposed by important thinkers in both Eastern and Western traditions. Our cross-cultural approach will not only offer us an opportunity to learn from the accumulated wisdom of different cultures concerning the nature and sources of happiness, but also help us to appreciate philosophy as a *global* endeavor, a practice that is anchored in our very nature as intelligent beings. Additionally, this course takes on an interdisciplinary approach by not only using conceptual analysis and logical argumentation—the traditional tools of philosophy—but also by drawing upon recent developments in empirical psychology. Our goal is to deepen our understanding of *human* well-being—a realizable vision of flourishing given our bodily and psychological constitution.

Through our readings and discussions, we will tackle such questions as:

- What is the nature of the good life?
- What is the relationship between virtue and happiness?
- Should happiness be our ultimate practical aim?
- Is reason or emotion more central to the happy life?
- Can the empirical sciences tell us anything about the good life?
- Is happiness a matter of perspective, wholly dependent on subjective attitudes?
- Are there effective ways of increasing happiness?
- What is the impact of our social conditions on happiness?

Required Texts:

Six Myths About the Good Life: Thinking About What Has Value by Joel J. Kupperman

Additional readings will be made available.

Course Requirement:

Two short papers (2-3 pages): 15%

One longer paper (5-7 pages): 35%

Midterm exam: 15%

Final exam: 20%

Participation: 10%

Reading quiz: 5%

The first two papers will be 2-3 pages each. In the first paper you will reconstruct and explain an argument of another philosopher. In the second paper you will present and defend an argument of your own. In the third paper (5-7 pages) you will reconstruct and explain an argument of another philosopher and evaluate that argument.

The participation grade will be determined by your attendance and participation in class. Everyone is expected to participate by being attentive to both the lectures and the questions of other students. If you suffer from shyness, you may also help make up for the participation grade by coming to office hours.

5% of your total grade will be determined by reading quizzes. You will receive 10 short reading quizzes throughout the semester. Only the 5 highest scores will be graded. There will be no make-up quizzes. Each reading quiz will test your basic knowledge of the reading for that day.

Deadlines:

All assignments are due at the beginning of class. The hard copy should have a cover sheet with your name and the title of your paper. Any assignment that is late will be penalized one letter grade for each day that it is late.

Plagiarism and Cheating:

Any plagiarism or cheating may be reported to the Honesty Committee and can result in an F for the assignment and an F for the course. If you find yourself in a hard place, please explain your situation to me. Cheating has resulted in academic ruin for many students. Don't let this happen to you.

Provisional Class Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to happiness

Daniel Haybron, "Happiness, Well-Being, and the Good Life: A Primer." (Excerpt from the *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*)

Christopher Heathwood, "Welfare" (*Routledge Companion to Ethics*)

Week 2: Pleasure-based accounts of happiness (hedonism)

Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"

L.W. Sumner, "Hedonism" (*Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*: ch.4)

Joel Kupperman, "Myth One: Pursuing Comforts and Pleasure Will Lead to the Best Possible Life" (in *Six Myths*)

Week 3: Desire-based accounts of happiness

Christopher Heathwood, "Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism" (*Philosophical Studies*)

Richard Kraut, "Desire and the Human Good" (*Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*)

Week 4: Objective-list accounts of happiness

Christopher Rice, "Defending the objective list theory of well-being" (*Ratio*)

L.W. Sumner, "Objective theories" (*Welfare*: ch. 3)

Short Paper #1 Due (2-3 pages)

Week 5: Virtue and happiness

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (excerpt)

Daniel Haybron, "Well-being and Virtue" (*Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy*)

Mark LeBar and Russell, "Well-Being and Eudaimonia" (*Aristotelian Ethics in Contemporary Perspective*)

Week 6: Eastern Conceptions of Happiness: Early Confucianism

Analects of Confucius (excerpts)

Mengzi (excerpts)

Xunzi (excerpts)

Philip J. Ivanhoe, "A Happy Symmetry: Xunzi's Ecological Ethic" (*Ritual & Religion in the Xunzi*)

Richard Kim, "Well-Being and Confucianism" (*Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Well-Being*)

Week 7: Eastern Conceptions of Happiness: Daoism

Daodejing (excerpts)

Zhuangzi (excerpts)

Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Happiness in Early Chinese Thought" (*Oxford Handbook of Happiness*)

Justin Tiwald, "Well-Being and Daoism" (*Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Well-Being*)

Week 8: Eastern Conceptions of Happiness: Buddhism

Readings on the Buddhist tradition (*A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*)

Christopher Gowans, "Well-Being and Buddhism" (*Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Well-Being*)

Week 9: Islamic Conceptions of Happiness

Al Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (excerpts)

Al Farabi, *The Attainment of Happiness* (excerpts)

Short Paper #2 Due (2-3 pages)

Week 10: Empirical Study of Happiness: Positive Psychology

Valerie Tiberius and Alexandra Plakias, "Well-Being" (*The Moral Psychology Handbook*)
Martin Seligman, "The Past and Future of Positive Psychology." (*Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived*)

Week 11: Empirical Study of Happiness: Positive Psychology (continued)

Ed Diener et al., "Subjective Well-Being: The Science of Happiness and Life Satisfaction."
(*Handbook of Positive Psychology*)
Richard Lazarus, "Does the Positive Psychology Movement Have Legs?" (*Psychological Inquiry*)

Week 12: Empirical Study of Happiness: Introspection and self-reporting

Daniel Haybron, "Do we know how happy we are? On some limits of affective introspection and recall." (*Nous*)
Jonathan Schooler et al., "The Pursuit and Assessment of Happiness can be Self-Defeating" (*The Psychology of Economic Decisions*)

Week 13: Can we make ourselves happier? Strategies from empirical science

Barbara L. Frederickson and Marcial F. Losada, "Positive Affect and the Complex Dynamics of Human Flourishing," (*American Psychologist*)
Sonja Lyubomirsky, "Why Are Some People Happier Than Others? The Role of Cognitive and Motivational Processes in Well-Being." (*American Psychologist*)
Sonja Lyubomirsky et al., "Pursuing Happiness: Architecture of Sustainable Change." (*Review of General Psychology*)

Long Paper Due (5-7 pages)