

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Philosophy of Happiness
Course Code	: PHI3105
Recommended Study Year	: 3 rd Year
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Sectional Approach
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours per week
Category in Major Programme	: Programme Elective - Ethics and Practical Philosophy Profile
Prerequisite(s)	: N/A
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

What is happiness? How can we live a happy life? These questions have troubled philosophers, writers, religious leaders and other wise men since ancient times. In this course we will examine philosophical answers to the problem of human happiness from various times and places in human history. Since ideas don't grow in the void, and thinkers also live embedded into human society, we will also try to see the connection between the historical and biographical context of the author and his or her theory of happiness, before we discuss the application of the various concepts to our own lives of today. In order to enhance the directness of the experience, the course will be based almost entirely on the discussion of original reading material from various times and places (in English translation). Therefore participants must be willing to read, think about, and discuss the (sometimes lengthy) materials in class, including one complete (but short) novel.

Aims

- To present classic as well as unorthodox philosophical answers to the problem of human happiness.
- To deepen the participants' understanding of the many facets of human happiness and the complexity of the issues involved.
- To enhance students' appreciation of the connection between ideas and their historical and biographical context.
- To discuss the application of historical concepts of happiness to today's life.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, successful participants will:

1. Understand and be able to elaborate on the complexity and subjectivity of the problem of human happiness
2. Understand the aspects of the problem which are common to all times and places, and make a connection to their own situation in life
3. Have basic knowledge of the discussed times and places, the historical circumstances underlying particular theories, as well as the biographies of selected thinkers, and they will be able to relate this information to the particular theory discussed
4. Have first-hand experience reading extracts from some classic works of human thought on happiness (see "Readings" below)
5. Be able to explore original readings in a class discussion and to extract the meaning of philosophical or literary works, as well as to apply these ideas to other circumstances

Indicative Content

1. The Greek and the Chinese approach: Aristotle: “Nicomachean Ethics”; Mencius on Happiness
2. Epicurean happiness: Epicurus: “Letter to Menoecus,” Leading Doctrines; Modern Epicureanism: Stephanie Mills: “Epicurean Simplicity” (excerpts)
3. Stoic philosophy: Seneca: “On the Happy Life”; Epictetus: “Enchiridion”
4. Buddhism: Gautama Buddha; Seung Sahn: “What is Happiness?”; Thich Nhat Hanh: “The Miracle of Mindfulness”
5. Happiness in God: Augustine: “The Happy Life”; Thomas Aquinas: “Summa Contra Gentiles” (excerpts)
6. Utilitarianism and the democratization of happiness: Bentham: “Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation”; Mill: “Utilitarianism”
7. Controlling the passions: Hume: “The Sceptic”
8. Unhappiness: Schopenhauer: “On the Variety and Suffering of Life”; C.S. Lewis: “We Have No Right to Happiness”
9. Happiness and society: Robert Owen, “Social Responsibility and Happiness” (A New View of Society, First Essay); Erich Fromm: “To Have and To Be” (excerpts)
10. Modern analytic approaches: Bertrand Russell: “The Conquest of Happiness”; R. Taylor: “Virtue Ethics”
11. Happiness through altered consciousness: Aldous Huxley: “Doors of Perception” and “Island”
12. Modern science and the study of happiness: Lyubomirsky, Schkade, Sheldon: “Pursuing Happiness: The Architecture of Sustainable Change”; Fowler and Christakis: “Dynamic Spread of Happiness in a Large Social Network: Longitudinal Analysis Over 20 Years in the Framingham Heart Study”; The pleasure paradox
13. Contemporary philosophical approaches: R. Kraut: “Two Conceptions of Happiness”; J. Annas: “Virtue and Eudaimonism”; Kekes: “Attitudinal and Episodic Happiness”; D. Haybron: “Why Hedonism is False”
14. Epilogue: Stages of happiness and realization: Hermann Hesse’s “Siddhartha”

Teaching Method

- Reading of the materials before class is mandatory
- In class, presentations by the students will explore the historical and biographical context of selected works
- In class discussions, the meaning of the text and the applications of its ideas to other situations and the present time will be explored

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

- Presentations by the students will show their appreciation of historical and biographical context (LO#3)
- Class discussions will measure the students’ understanding of the reading material, the ideas presented, and their ability to apply these ideas to their own lives (LO#2, 5)
- A term paper will show the students’ ability to reflect on their own about the materials presented (LO#1 and #3)
- A final examination will assess the students’ knowledge of the facts of some of the most important theories of happiness (LO#1, #3, #5)

Assessment

Participation in class, including presentations and writing assignments (or homework) 40%. Term paper 30%. Final exam 30%

Required Readings

All reading materials will be provided online in WebCT!

Selections from:

- Bolte Taylor, Jill: "My Stroke of Insight." Viking, 2008.
- Cahn, S. M. and Vitrano, C: "Happiness." Classic and Contemporary Readings in Philosophy. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- De Botton, Alain: "Status Anxiety." Penguin, 2004.
- Epictetus: "Enchiridion."
- Fowler, James H. and Nicholas A. Christakis. "Dynamic Spread of Happiness in a Large Social Network: Longitudinal Analysis Over 20 Years in the Framingham Heart Study." British Medical Journal 338 (768), 2009.
- Fromm, Erich: "To Have and To Be."
- Hanh, Thich Nhat: "The Miracle of Mindfulness."
- Hesse, Hermann: "Siddhartha."
- Huxley, A.: "The Doors of Perception."
- Huxley, A.: "Island."
- Lin, Yutang: "The Importance of Living." New York: William Morrow, 1998.
- Loyd, Robin: "Best Benefit of Exercise? Happiness." Fox News, May 30, 2006.
- Lyubomirsky, S., David Schkade and Kennon M. Sheldon, "Pursuing Happiness: The Architecture of Sustainable Change," Review of General Psychology, Vol. 9, No. 2, 111–131, 2005.
- Mills, Stephanie: "Epicurean Simplicity." 2001.
- Owen, Robert: "Social Responsibility and Happiness."
- Russell, B.: "The Conquest of Happiness."
- Sahn, Seung: "What is Happiness?"
- Watts, Alan: "The Meaning of Happiness." Harper Colophon Books, 1968.

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is "the presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student's own work". Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course "Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness" is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>