

On Happiness

[Roosevelt University](#), Spring 2012, PHIL 250

Tuesday and Thursdays, 9:30-10:45 pm, AUD 306

[Professor Svetozar Minkov](#),

Questions of the Course

What are the fundamental questions that run through the course and tie it together? What is the nature of happiness--what are the respective roles of feeling and thinking in it? What is the relation of happiness to love, friendship, morality, piety, freedom, [power](#), money, death? What are the obstacles to happiness or fulfillment?

We will consider the question of happiness with the help of many sources: fiction writers, psychologists, Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Pascal, and Rousseau... We will attempt to combine "ancient wisdom" with "modern science." We will begin by reading or viewing several thoughtful vignettes from modern psychology, literature, and philosophy. In reading a selection from Plato's *Symposium*, we will seek to learn about love and nobility as paths to happiness. We will also examine Plato's suggestion that the very search for happiness may turn out to be the kind of fulfillment we desire. We will also study Hobbes's and Pascal's respective analyses of human life – analyses apparently similar in their bleakness, but with Pascal holding out a hope for divine help and Hobbes showing toughness and even cheerfulness in the face of his apparently dark teaching. We will conclude with Rousseau who promotes the conception of living in the momentary but sweet sentiment of existence, but also undermines Pascal's hope, challenges Hobbes's asocial picture, and even appears to suggest the philosophic life as an approach to the problem of happiness.

By the end of the course, students should be able to treat these issues and questions with confidence, precision, and nuance.

[Other notions of happiness: equilibrium/balance between desires and powers; genuine satisfaction of true needs; intense, vivid, immediate experiences; wholeness of soul; being lost in something greater than oneself; see also: [Aristotle's definition](#)]

Book

Most of the readings will be linked to here. You only need to acquire only one books (in Butterworth's translation) [available at the bookstore]: [Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*](#).

Reading Assignments

January 17, Introduction

January 19 *watch*: Dan Gilbert: [Ted Lecture](#); [comments by Professor Minkov on Dan Gilbert's talk](#)

January 24, read, prepare to discuss, and bring to class this [chapter from Jonathan Haidt's Happiness Hypothesis](#) [optional: [Interview with Haidt, author of the Happiness of Hypothesis](#)]

January 26, re-read, prepare to discuss, and bring to class this [chapter from Jonathan Haidt's Happiness Hypothesis](#)

[optional: six brief vignettes]: [Homer's Odyssey](#) [illusion vs. reality], [Walt Whitman](#) [thinking vs. experience], [Tolstoy](#) [the fulfillment of work: see Haidt]; [Dickinson](#), [Robert Louis Stevenson](#), [Percy](#)

January 31, [Bertrand Russell on Happiness](#)

February 2, [**first short paper due**; [guidelines](#)]; plus, read [Ronald Dworkin's short essay on the good life](#) ["a highly readable attempt by a pre-eminent legal philosopher; requires reconciling morals (how we should treat others) with ethics (how we should live ourselves); and making room for spontaneity, risk-taking."]

February 7, [Damasio on Spinoza](#)

February 9, [Damasio on Spinoza](#)

February 14, [David Foster Wallace](#), address at Kenyon

February 16, re-read, prepare to discuss, and bring to class [Bruell's essay on happiness](#)

February 21, read, prepare to discuss, and bring to class [Bruell's essay on happiness](#) [**second short paper due**; [guidelines](#)]

February 23, [Plato's Symposium](#) [Eryximachus' speech: pp. 247-250]

February 28, [Plato's Symposium](#) [Aristophanes' speech: pp. 250-254]

March 1, [Plato's Symposium](#) [Agathon's speech: pp. 254-263]

March 6, [Plato's Symposium](#) [Socrates' speech: pp. 263-274]

March 8, [Plato's Symposium](#) [Socrates' speech: pp. 263-274]

March 13: Spring Break

March 15: Spring Break

March 20, Plato's Symposium, Socrates' speech; Alcibiades' speech

March 22, conclude Plato's Symposium

March 27, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, [chapter 11](#) [third short paper due: On Plato's Symposium]
[guidelines](#)

March 29, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, [chapter 11](#)

April 3, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, [chapter 13](#)

April 5, [What Makes Us Happy](#)

April 10, begin *Reveries*, "Walks" 1-2 [[notes](#)]

April 12, [no class--professor at conference] Rousseau, *Reveries* "Walk" 3

April 17: Walks 2-3 ([Notes on Walks 1-3](#)) fourth short paper due: [guidelines](#)]

April 19, *Reveries* "Walks" 4-5 ([notes](#))

April 24, *Reveries* "Walk" 6-8 ([notes](#))

April 26, *Reveries*, "Walks" 9-10