

## **Syllabus for INTG002: Happiness and Despair**

Integrated Studies Program, University of Pennsylvania, Spring 2021

Happiness and despair seem to be at the opposite ends of human experience. Life at its best brings happiness; at its worst, despair. For this reason, we seek happiness and avoid despair. Yet happiness is notoriously difficult to find, and seeking it can sometimes lead to unhappiness and even despair itself. Despair, on the other hand, can be difficult to avoid, and failure to evade it can actually lead us deeper into it. Living life well may not be as simple as seeking happiness and avoiding despair. Does this mean, paradoxically, that life might go better if we seek things other than happiness and if we stop avoiding despair?

A consideration of this question calls for a definition of its terms. What is happiness? What is despair? What does it mean for life to go well? Derived from the word ‘hap,’ meaning good fortune or good luck, happiness seems to be something outside of our control. To the extent this is true, seeking happiness is trying to control our luck—like attempting to get double sixes with every roll of a pair of dice. Although etymologically rooted in notions of fortune and luck, happiness can also refer to well-being or flourishing, and we will explore ways in which happiness in these broader senses can be more under our control.

Derived from the French word for ‘hopelessness,’ despair is the lack of expectation of something desired. What makes despair so difficult is that we want something that seems impossible. Understanding despair as wanting what we cannot have may help us deal with it better – by learning to accept our unfulfilled desires, thinking of new ways they can be fulfilled, or letting go of them in favor of ones that can be fulfilled.

More broadly, what does it mean for life to go well? Researchers in the field of positive psychology use a variety of scientific methods to study aspects of well-being such as positive emotions, satisfaction with life, strengths and virtue, and meaning and purpose. Religion offers much older answers to this question. Divine revelations, religious laws, and spiritual practices have traditionally established the criteria for a life well lived. Do science and religion agree on what it means to live life well? If their perspectives diverge, which domain supplies the more trustworthy answers?

The relationship of happiness and despair to the life well lived is not just a theoretical matter. It is a practical question that affects each of us. The most important question we will consider is how each of us will apply what we learn about happiness and despair and about religious and scientific approaches to life in our own quest to live life well.

**Teaching Team:**

Justin McDaniel, James Pawelski, Judith Kaplan, Raffi Krut-Landau, Julio Tuma

***Class meeting times:***

Tuesday meeting: 10:30-11:50am<sup>1</sup>

Tuesday, "Dr. is in the House": 3-4:20pm

Thursday Symposium: 10:30-11:50am

Friday Seminars: 10-10:50am (301); 11-11:50am (302, 303); 12pm-12:50pm (304, 305); 1-2pm (306)

N.B. To ensure equitable access to this course, we may record some class sessions and make recordings available to all members of the class. Your use of these recordings is limited to this class; you should not share these recordings with anyone outside the class or otherwise reproduce their content. This policy exists to ensure the confidentiality of our classroom discussion and thereby facilitate the free exchange of ideas. It also honors the creativity and labor that we have invested in creating the course content.

**Course Aims & Requirements:**

The course will take place in three streams: Positive Psychology, Religious Studies, and Integration. Each stream is worth 30% of your overall grade. The Thursday Symposia (participation and attendance) make up the remaining 10%.

**The Science of Happiness**

Happiness is something we all want. We wish it for our family and friends on birthdays and at the New Year. Coke wants us to open it, and Pharrell Williams has a hit song about it. But what is happiness? Is it a feeling, like pleasure? Is it some kind of emotion, like joy or serenity? Is it a state of mind, like being satisfied with your life? Is it an activity, like doing what you were meant to do? Is it the most important thing in life, or a distraction from what is important? Is it something fleeting, or long lasting? Is it just for individuals, or can groups or societies be happy? Is it culturally determined, or is it the same for everyone? Ultimately, we want more than to know what happiness is, of course: We want to experience it. Is happiness just a matter of luck, or can it be successfully pursued? Can just anyone be happy, or only a fortunate few? Does it come when you have plenty of money, fame, and fortune? When you have overcome all of your problems and are free of despair? When you have finally achieved your dreams? Or when you learn to accept the world and your life as it is? In this course, we will explore these questions through the lens of the scientific study of happiness. We will focus especially on the field of positive

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<sup>1</sup> All times in this document are in Eastern Time.

psychology, which was founded in the late 1990s by Martin Seligman right here at the University of Pennsylvania. We will consider the empirical methods scientists use to study happiness, noting both the power and the limitations of these approaches. We will then explore the results obtained by these methods, covering a variety of topics related to happiness and following Seligman's heuristic of PERMA, which stands for Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. This investigation will suggest that there are skills we can learn and habits we can develop to become happier, and we will invest significant time and attention experimenting with these skills and habits to see what actually does increase happiness in our own lives and communities.

**Positive Psychology Stream Requirements:**

(30% of overall INTG002 grade)

Participation, experiential exercises, and mini-assignments linked to the readings: 20%, due throughout the semester

Paper #1 (max 1500 words): 40% due February 23 at 10am by submission to Canvas

Paper #2 (max 1500 words): 40% due April 13 at 10am by submission to Canvas

**The Religion of Despair**

Despair is something we generally try to avoid. It is associated with verbs of descent or loss. We fall into a pit of despair, we sink into loneliness, we lose faith, we descend into hopelessness, our hearts break, we are crestfallen, we lose our lust for life. But can despair be productive? Think of the creative power of a broken heart, beautiful poetry and art produced by those with tortured souls or tormented psyches. Despair demands us to pay attention, to stop blindly accepting the state of our being, to question our faith, to wrestle with pain, and to journey through the dark night of the soul. Despair can lead us to drug and alcohol abuse, long sleepless nights, moments of confessional emotional cleansing, of drunken texts to old lovers, to composing sad songs and sappy poetry. Think of a world without the work of Vincent Van Gogh, Maya Angelou, Anna Akhmatova, Samuel Beckett, Yukio Mishima, Lenora Carrington, Ian Curtis, or John Coltrane. But is experiencing despair worth it? Would you choose a broken heart for a good poem? Would you want to give up moments of daily joy with family and friends for the possibility of a deeper connection to the cosmos that comes with being alone, truly alone? Should we prepare ourselves for life's inevitable traumatic moments (death of parents, loss of pets, natural disasters, aging, sickness, loss of job, divorce, death, etc.) by practicing daily acts of depression? Does despair need preparation? Can it be avoided entirely? Would we want a life in which happiness was consistent and expected or would that be simply boring? In this course, we will explore these questions through the lens of the study of

religion. We will focus on the ways in which various religious traditions have encouraged ascetic, monastic, devotional, and shamanistic practices which seem to promote self-torture, denial, and existential suffering. Concepts such as the Buddhist non-self and non-attachment, Islamic devotion and miraj, and Catholic ideas of the suffering servant will be examined. We will also look at dystopian cults and utopian societies that promote control and nihilism or solitude to escape the trappings of life. We will not be limited to religion though; we will compare how the supposedly secular practices of psychedelic drug use, alcohol abuse, heartache, and loneliness displayed in modern music, art, and literature often mimic art and poetry of religious longing and emptiness.

**Religious Studies Stream Requirements:**

(30% of overall INTG002 grade)

Participation, experiential exercises, and mini-assignments linked to the readings: 20%, due throughout the semester

Paper #1 (max 1500 words): 40% due March 2 at 10am by submission to Canvas

Paper #2 (max 1500 words): 40% due April 20 at 10am by submission to Canvas

**Integrated Stream:**

The Friday Seminars will continue to be a cornerstone of ISP. Their goal, as you have experienced, is to give you the opportunity to develop your ability to integrate different academic disciplines, keeping in mind that a “discipline” (from the Latin *discere*, “to learn”) is a *way of learning*. Friday Seminars thus allow you not just to acquire new knowledge, but to think about different ways of knowing. They also serve as the primary venue for expressing and discussing ideas with your peers. It is a discussion-based seminar; participation and attendance is mandatory and part of your seminar grade. We expect you to engage in serious debate, deep thinking, and courteous dialogue because we believe it provides a productive foundation for understanding ourselves and our relationship with the society in which we live. In the course of your participation, we encourage you to work on honing the skills and confidence to communicate your ideas effectively. In Friday Seminars we will consider issues that arose in the Thursday Integrative Sessions, discuss the content of the two streams for the week, and prepare for the various seminar assignments. Throughout, we ask you to focus on the following questions: Why do we divide knowledge into different disciplines (or majors)? Are these distinctions primarily about subject matter, about the kinds of questions we ask, the methods we use to answer those questions, or the nature of the answers themselves? How do interactions between disciplines open up new ways of understanding the nature of happiness and despair? Finally, we add a group presentation component in the second semester of ISP both to give you the experience of presenting to a small seminar –

something we expect you to continue to do in small seminars including BFS seminars in the years to come – and to give you a chance to put together your own seminar during a given week in the first third of the semester. These are meant to be fun and to give you the freedom to explore your interests in integration for a weekly topic.

**Integrated Stream Requirements:**

(30% of overall INTG002 grade)

Attendance & Participation: 20%, tabulated at the end of the semester.

Group Presentation: 30%, to be organized and scheduled at the beginning of the semester in each of your seminars.

Integration Essay 1: 20%, due by submission to Canvas on Friday March 19th by 9pm.

Integration Essay 2: 30%, due by submission to Canvas on Friday April 16<sup>th</sup> by 9pm.

**Thursday Integrative Session Requirements:**

(10% of overall INTG002 grade)

Attendance and Participation during weekly symposia including submitting written assignments, in-class exercises, or preparation for guest lecturers or skill-building exercises will be expected of each of you. Thursdays are where integration begins and it sets up the discussions and activities of integration in Friday seminars. If you are unable to attend Thursday symposia for a valid reason (see below section on attendance at synchronous sessions), your presence and participation via on-line discussion boards will be required.

**Course Delivery:**

1. **Readings:** Readings for the positive psychology stream will be posted to Canvas. Readings for the religious studies stream will come from books (listed below) which you will need to purchase. Please have all of a given week's readings read (at least once) by the Sunday evening prior to the week.
2. **Lectures:** Stream Professors will upload their lectures to Canvas (again, look in the Module for a given week) by Sunday evening. Please listen to the uploaded lectures *before* posting your reading response..
3. **Reading responses or discussion posts:** Each week you will be required to upload a reading response or a question to Canvas no later than 8:00 pm Eastern time on Monday. This is to make sure you've understood the content from the readings and lectures and to prepare you and your instructors for class.
4. **Experiential exercises:** Each week, you will be asked to carry out an activity to explore the practical value of the ideas we will be discussing.
5. **Class meetings:** On Tuesdays from 10:30-11:10am (Positive Psychology) and 11:10-11:50am (Religious Studies) we will all meet as a group on Zoom, both to briefly review

the recorded lectures but principally to work in break-out groups to discuss questions set out in the lectures. This is your opportunity to meet students from the class (who may not be in your Friday seminars), decide what *you* think about the material for the week and to ask questions of the stream professors. For those who cannot participate, you will be expected to make a discussion post probing some question of particular interest to you and/or a response to some other discussion posts for the week.

6. **“Dr. is in the House” class conversations:** During our regularly scheduled Tuesday afternoon slot (3-4:20pm) both stream professors will hold extended discussion and answer sessions or help with particularly interesting or difficult stream material. No formal preparation is required, apart from having done the assigned reading and watched the pre-recorded lectures. Bring your questions, and be ready to share your ideas on others’ questions.
7. **Preparation for Thursday Symposia:** This may involve a brief additional reading, preparing for a guest lecturer’s visit, or submitting a question or short assignment in preparation for Thursday symposia.
8. **Thursday Symposia:** We will have special integrative sessions on Thursdays (10:30-11:50am) where we will engage in integrative structured in-class activities or hear from guest lecturers.
9. **Friday Seminars:** Please attend the seminar assigned to you by the Registrar with the following instructors and times:

- 301 Dr. Tuma, Fridays 10:00-10:50am
- 302 Dr. Tuma, Fridays 11:00-11:50am
- 303 Dr. Krut-Landau, Fridays 11:00-11:50am
- 304 Dr. Krut-Landau, Fridays 12:00-12:50pm
- 305 Dr. Kaplan, Fridays 12:00-12:50pm
- 306 Dr. Kaplan, Fridays 1:00-1:50pm

#### **Course Policies:**

**Attendance at Synchronous Sessions (Class or Seminars):** Attendance in live discussions is an important part of your education and is therefore graded. Legitimate grounds for an excused absence include the following:

- **The live discussion occurs before 7am or after 8pm in your time zone.**
- You are observing a [college-listed religious holiday](#).
- You need to be absent for medical reasons.
- You cannot participate because of technical difficulties. Keep in mind that Zoom sessions can be joined by phone.
- You are taking care of a family member.

To request an excused absence from a synchronous session, please email the instructor leading that session as soon as possible, ideally before the session. If you're not sure who the instructor is, email your seminar leader. Please also be in touch with any other issues that may arise.

**Due dates:**

Assignments are due promptly on the day and time indicated in the course map (ISP syllabus). Late assignments will be marked a third of a grade down per day late.

You will be given 2 “flex” days in each stream (6 total) to be used at your discretion. You can use a flex day to get an extra 24 hours to work on any major written assignment (not on weekly responses or mini-assignments), without incurring a lateness penalty. These can be used singly (e.g., for submitting two separate assignments in the Integrated Stream, each one day late) or in combination (e.g., submitting the final assignment in the history stream 2 days beyond the due date). You must indicate use of the flex day(s) along with your name and date at the top of your assignment or else they will not be credited to you. You may not use more than 2 flex days in any one stream. For example, you can't carry over extra flex days from the Integrated Stream for use in the positive psychology stream. Additional extensions will be considered only in cases of documented medical or family emergency.

**Code of Academic Integrity:** For each and every assignment in ISP, you are expected to do your own work. For written assignments you must use specific quotations and arguments from the readings and the lectures to argue for your case. In doing so, you will be expected to adhere to the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity (see: [Integrity](#)). If you are not sure whether something needs to be cited — cite it! Any questions should be directed to the teaching team. Violations of the Code will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct.

**Texts:**

***Required for the positive psychology stream:***

All positive psychology readings will be available through the Canvas course website.

***Required for the religious studies stream (available in the Penn Bookstore and electronically in Canvas: Library Reserve):***

James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

Shusaku Endo's *Silence*

Carlos Casteneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan*

Emma Donoghue's *The Wonder*

Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*

Jose Saramago's *Blindness*

Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man*

Hermann Hesse's *Narcissus and Goldmund*

Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*

Yukio Mishima's *Temple of the Golden Pavilion*

William Burroughs' *Junky*

Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*

Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*

**Tools:** We will be using Canvas, Zoom, Panopto (an add-on to Canvas) and possibly Perusall (another Canvas add-on) for this course. There are excellent online tutorials for each, but in addition, we will go over these tools during the first week of class meetings.

## Schedule of Lectures and Readings

**Positive Psychology (PP): Professor James Pawelski**  
**Religion (R): Professor Justin McDaniel**

## Week 0

*Th. Jan. 21: Introductions*

**Th. Jan 21: Introduction to the Streams**

## Week 1

*T. Jan. 26: Defining Happiness and Despair*

### **PP: What Is Happiness?**

Happiness is easier to desire than define. We will explore various ways it has been characterized across time and cultures, noting strengths and weaknesses in different definitions.

#### **Readings:**

- McMahon, 2018, From the Paleolithic to the Present (8/10)
- Ryan and Deci, 2001, Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being (21/26)
- Oishi, Diener, and Lucas, 2018, Subjective Well-Being (9/20)
- Ryff, 2014, Psychological Well-Being Revisited (14/19)

### **R: What Is Despair?**

Is despair negative? Could despair be productive? We will explore ways in which the study of Religion sees the importance of suffering, sadness, struggle, and despair.

**Readings:** Book of Lamentations; Psalm 6:2-3, 6-7; Qur'ān 4:29; *The Four Noble Truths; Dark Night Of The Soul*; T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*; and several others.

Th. Jan 28: James Pawelski – Positive Introductions

## Week 2

*T. Feb. 2: Ways of Knowing in Science and Religion*

### **PP: The Scientific Methods of Empirical Psychology**

In the last few decades, social scientists have become deeply interested in the empirical study of happiness. We will focus especially on the discipline of psychology, considering the scientific methods research psychologists use and exploring both the power and the limitations of these methods.

**Readings:**

- Diener, 2021, Why Science? (14/19)  
Smith, 2021, Thinking like a Psychological Scientist (27/33)  
(15 minutes of linked videos can be accessed here:  
<https://nobaproject.com/modules/thinking-like-a-psychological-scientist>)  
Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2021, Replication Crisis in Psychology (12/18)

**R: The Humanistic Methods of Religious Studies**

Introducing the history of the study of religion through major thinkers like Otto, Ortner, Freud, Marx, Durkheim, Proudfoot, Asad, among others. We will look at the Psychological, Sociological, Economic-Political, and Emotional approaches to the study of religion.

**Reading:** James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

Th. Feb 4: McDaniel and Pawelski (moderator: Tuma): Debating scientific and religious epistemology.  
[Sunday: Begin Integrative Assignment for Th. Feb. 11].

## Week 3

*T. Feb. 9: The Study and Practice of Happiness and Despair***PP: What Is Positive Psychology?**

The field of positive psychology was launched in 1998 by Penn psychology professor Martin Seligman when he was president of the American Psychological Association. We will examine what positive psychology is, why it has grown so quickly, and what it has to say about the study and pursuit of happiness. We will pay special attention to Seligman's theory of well-being, PERMA, which stands for Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, and which will guide our study of happiness for the rest of the semester.

**Readings:**

- Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, Introduction to Positive Psychology (9/10)  
Lyubomirsky, 2008, How of Happiness, Chapter 1 (14)  
Pawelski, 2016, Defining the Positive, Part II (8/9)  
Gallagher and Lopez, 2019, Strengthening Positive Psychology (7/8)  
Baumeister et al., 2001, Bad Is Stronger Than Good (40/48)

**R: Asceticism and Self-Denial/Torture**

Why do so many practitioners in so many religious traditions regularly practice self-denial (celibacy, fasting, exhaustion, poverty) and harsh austerities (cutting, self-flagellation, crucifixion, castration, extreme exposure, etc.)? Are these productive practices? Are they related to non-religious practices like BDSM, extreme-exercise, torture porn, extreme-veganism?

**Reading:** Shusaku Endo's *Silence*

**Th. Feb. 11: Integrated assignment:** Religious practitioners all over the world have employed physical objects to help them pray, meditate, wonder, and remember. Well-known objects include rosaries,

talismans, candles, small knives, rubbing stones, paint brushes, cords/robes, small texts, bones, vials of blood, teeth, and amulets of various sorts. This week every student will be asked to create their own “meditation object” or what Buddhists call “kasina.” This must be handmade and be light enough to hold in your hands while meditating and/or small enough to carry easily in a bag or your pocket all day every day. It can be made of natural materials or plastic. It can be painted or carved (be careful!). It can make sounds or contain liquid. You have to make it, post a photograph of it, describe why you made it and how it aids you in meditation, prayer, or simple focus. It might be something that evokes memories, creates peace and calm, or even scares you. It doesn’t have to be beautiful or pleasant. Often facing fears is an effective religious technique. I look forward to your creative and reflective examples. I would also like you to meditate or pray or “do nothing” for 45 minutes each day while holding or looking at your object. Please write about your experience with this time period each day after you finish.

Th. Feb. 11: McDaniel: Discussion of assignment on physical objects

F. Feb 12: NO CLASS

## Week 4

*T. Feb. 16: Pathways to Growth and Insight*

### **PP: Character Strengths and Virtues**

One of the first projects undertaken in positive psychology was the creation of a classification of strengths and virtues. Envisioned as a complement to the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, this classification focuses on the core character strengths and virtues human beings have valued across time and culture. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this classification? Can it be used practically to cultivate strengths and virtues in individuals, organizations, and communities?

#### **Readings:**

- Peterson, 2006, Character Strengths (17/18)
- Film: The Science of Character (8 min): <https://www.letitripple.org/films/science-of-character/>
- Watkins and McCurrach, 2017, Gratitude (18/25)
- Silvia and Kashdan, 2017, Curiosity and Interest (12/20)
- Duckworth, 2016, Chapter 6 - Interest (22)

### **R: Mind-altering Practices and Drugs: Shamanism and Psychedelics**

Religious practitioners have regularly turned to intense physical practices and psychoactive substances to alter the mind in the service of discovering spiritual truths, communicating with the dead or divine, and going into deep forms of meditation. Are these tools short-cuts? Do they only produce temporary psychosis that is interpreted as spiritual? What dangers are there?

**Reading:** Carlos Casteneda’s *The Teachings of Don Juan*

#### **Integrated assignment:**

Th. Feb. 18: Guests: Seligman and Yaden

[**Sunday:** start preparing Integrative Assignment for Th. 25].

# Week 5

T. Feb. 23: *Emotions of Happiness and Despair*

## PP: Positive Emotions

For much of the twentieth century, psychologists considered emotions too fuzzy to study and too weak to drive behavior. According to the Broaden-and-Build theory advanced by Barbara Fredrickson, however, positive emotions can broaden our attention and help us build enduring physical, psychological, and social resources important for survival in the long run. Although we all experience positive emotions, many of us feel we do not experience enough of them. Savoring is a way of lengthening and strengthening the positive emotions we do have and balancing out our tendency toward an unbalanced focus on negative emotions.

### Readings:

- Fredrickson, 1998, What Good Are Positive Emotions (16/20)
- Catalino, Algoe, and Fredrickson, 2014, Prioritizing Positivity (13/15)
- Bryant and Veroff, 2007, Savoring, Chapter 4 (12/12)
- Caruso et al., 2015, Emotional Intelligence (10/14)

## R: Longing

From Saint Theresa to Rumi, Ibn Al'Arabi to Arjuna, how have religious figures expressed longing through devotion, poetry, and prayer?

**Readings:** Emma Donoghue's *The Wonder*.

**Th. February 25: Integrated session** (Justin McDaniel): Donoghue's *The Wonder* is about food, fasting, feeding, and faith. This week you will be asked to think about how you eat and how you consume. The poverty line in Philadelphia is 19,000 per year for a family of three and over 27% of the city's residents live below that poverty line. These families can spend usually no more than 75 dollars a week on food for their entire family. This week, you will be asked to give up your meal plan and spend 50 dollars max to feed yourself for the week (Sunday through Thursday). You also have to take on religious restrictions in eating. You have to eat the "Jain" way. Jainism is a religion from South Asia that is highly ascetic and restrictive. They practice strict ahimsa (non-violence) and their diets reflect this. You can eat no meat or animal products (i.e. cheese, milk, eggs, etc.). You cannot also eat any vegetable that grows underground like garlic, potatoes, carrots, radishes, sunchoke, beets, turmeric, artichoke, ginger, etc. You basically are restricted to beans, leafy vegetables, fruits, whole grains (farro, freekeh, buckwheat, etc.). You cannot have processed flour, processed sugar, or processed white rice. This entire week you also have to keep a running journal of how you purchase/your family purchases (including the amounts/receipts), prepare, store, and eat your meals. You can eat as much as you like, but not go over budget. You cannot use your meal plan. You are welcome though to donate the food you would have eaten on your meal plan or out with friends to someone in need. In addition to keeping the journal (which you can use to reflect on how you feel, your frustrations, etc.) you also cannot speak while you eat, watch any screens, read, write, etc. Just eat. You cannot speak to others when you eat, but you can sit near others if you like.

Th. Feb. 25: Krut-Landau

# Week 6

T. March 2: In/visibility  
\*\*PP #1 Due\*\*

## PP: Engagement: Attention, Will, and Habit

Our experience is influenced by what we pay attention to. Our lives are filled with people and things clamoring for our attention. To what degree does our happiness depend on what we focus on and on the habits we intentionally develop?

### Readings:

- Attention video
- William James, 1983, The Gospel of Relaxation (3)
- Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, Chapter 2 (20)
- William James, 1984, Habit (14)
- Wood, 2019, *Good Habits, Bad Habits* (36)
- Wood and Neal, 2016, Healthy Through Habit (11/14)

R: Into Great Silence and the Via Negativa: This will be a guided film watching and meditation.

Reading: *The Cloud of Unknowing*

Th. March 4: McDaniel (silence exercise)

# Week 7

T. March 9: Loss of the Self  
\*\*R Paper #1 Due\*\*

## PP: Engagement: Flow

Focusing fully on an activity can lead to a deeply satisfying state known as “flow”. What are the characteristics of flow? What are ways flow can add to our happiness? Can it ever detract from it?

### Readings:

- Killingsworth and Gilbert, 2010, A Wandering Mind (1)
- Csikszentmihalyi, Flow, Chapter 3 (34)
- Langer and Ngnoumen, 2019, Mindfulness (25/28)
- Shapiro, Jazaieri, and de Sousa, 2016, Meditation and Positive Psychology (18/27)

## R: Cults and Nihilism

Despair often needs company. Religions are communal. However, religious communities have often turned dangerous and abused and isolated their members. Jim Jones, the Manson Family, Skoptsy in Siberia, and Heaven's Gate are extreme examples, but the Shakers, Free Love Movement, Scientology, and various utopian and dystopian communities have thrived off of seeing life as full of despair with the only escape through the cult and its leader.

Readings: Jose Saramago's *Blindness*,

*This is Water* (David Foster Wallace) [Seminar Reading]

W. March 10: NO CLASS [Spring Break]  
Th. March 11: NO CLASS [Spring Break]

## Week 8

*T. March 16: Communal Relationships*

### **PP: Relationships: Communal**

Human beings are deeply social creatures. We want to feel like we belong and that we matter to those around us. Can communities and societies be more or less happy? What is the role of social justice in happiness?

#### **Readings:**

- Prilleltensky, 2019, Mattering (16/19)
- Schreiner and Hulme, 2017, Positive Psychology on Campus (16/23)
- Pileggi Pawelski, 2011, The Many Faces of Happiness (6)
- Pedrotti, Edwards, and Lopez, 2019, Cultural Contexts (14/21)
- Veenhoven, 2018, Happiness in Nations (20/24)

### **R: Monastic Practices**

While every religious group has forms of ascetic practice, only certain religions have developed large monastic institutions. We will look at Buddhist and Catholic monasticism and various practices like liquor making, gardening, vows of silence, etc.

**Reading:** Hermann Hesse's *Narcissus and Goldmund*

Th. March 18: Kaplan  
F. March 19: \*\*Integrative Essay #1 Due\*\*

## Week 9

*T. March 23: Personal Relationships*

### **PP: Relationships: Intimate**

Research indicates that relationships are perhaps the strongest determinants of our happiness. Yet we often take relationships for granted. Are there skills and habits we can learn and put into practice to cultivate healthier relationships?

#### **Readings:**

- Neff and Germer, 2017, Self-Compassion (18/27)
- Pileggi Pawelski and Pawelski, 2018, *Happy Together*, Chapter 8 (24)
- Gable and Maisel, 2019, Positive Processes in Close Relationships (13/22)
- Hendrick and Hendrick, 2017, Love (17/24)
- Sheridan, Moen, and Bhatia, 2017, Family-Centered Positive Psychology (20/26)

Demir, Orthel, and Andelin, 2013, Friendship and Happiness (8/14)

### R: Heartache

The end of relationships have been a great source of music, poetry, art, and filmmaking. Do we really want to be happy? Do we want the drama? Is heartache inspirational? Does loss of a romantic relationship lead to a closer relationship to spiritual beings? How have saints and monks seen their relationship with the divine as “love,” even erotic love?

**Readings:** Christopher Isherwood’s *A Single Man*

Th. March 25: Pawelski & Pileggi Pawelski on relationships

## Week 10

*Th. April 1: Meaning I*

T. NO CLASS

Th April 1:

### PP: Meaning: Interpretation

The meaning we give to the events in our lives influences the level of happiness we experience. Research indicates that even stress can have different physiological effects on our body, depending on how we interpret it. Are there ways of thinking about the events in our lives that are particularly conducive to happiness?

**Readings:**

Mens, Scheier, and Carver, 2016, Optimism (18/33)

Seligman, *Learned Optimism*, Chapters 2,3 (38)

McGonigal, 2015, The Upside of Stress, Introduction and Chapter 1 (40)

Dienstbier and PytlakZillig, 2016, Toughness Model (19/29)

### R: Non-self and Meaninglessness

This two-part lecture will look specifically at Buddhist theories on non-self and the liberation that comes with seeing life as meaningless and yourself as an illusion.

**Readings:** Brit Bennett’s *The Vanishing Half*

## Week 11

*T. April 6: Meaning II*

### PP: Meaning: Purpose

Given our mortality, an important component of happiness is living our lives in the service of something greater than we are. How can we develop purpose in our lives, and what are its effects?

**Readings:**

- Frankl, 1963, Man's Search for Meaning (17)
- Nagel, 1971, The Absurd (12)
- Steger, 2018, Meaning in Life (11/15)
- Duckworth, 2016, Chapter 8 – Purpose (28)
- Kashdan & McKnight, 2009, Origins of Purpose in Life (10/14)
- Pargament and Mahoney, 2017, Spirituality (16/24)

**R: Even More Non-self and Meaninglessness**

Looking at the Brahma-viharas and indifference

**Reading:** Yukio Mishima's *Temple of the Golden Pavilion*

**Th. April 8: Integrated Assignment** (McDaniel):

[M. April 12: NO CLASS (No Discussion Posting Due)]

## Week 12

*T. April 13: Achievement and Addiction*

**PP: Accomplishment: Goal setting**

Being adept at effective goal pursuit is important for achievement. Yet many of us lack good goal-setting skills. What does research tell us about how we can use goals effectively for accomplishment?

**Readings:**

- Maddux and Kleiman, 2016, Self-Efficacy (12/19)
- Locke, 1996, Goals Setting (7/8)
- Lyubomirsky, 2008, The How of Happiness, Chapter 8 (25)
- TBD
- TBD

**R: Addiction and Self-Destruction**

Here we will look at both great secular artists and writers and religious ones through their work and see how addiction, despair, and self-destruction are depicted.

**Readings:** William Burroughs' *Junky*

Th. April 15: Tuma

# Week 13

T. April 20: De/motivation  
\*\*PP Paper #2 Due\*\*

## PP: Accomplishment: Grit

Not all achievements are equally fulfilling. What are the kinds of achievements that tap into our passions and support our happiness? How can we stay the course toward those achievements, even when we would rather give up? To address these questions, we will look to the work Penn's own Angela Duckworth has done on the concept of "grit."

### Readings:

- Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly, 2007, Grit (14/15)
- Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth, 2014, True Grit (23/27)
- Rand and Touza, 2018, Hope Theory (20/34)
- TBD

## R: Apathy and Boredom

See *Slacker* and celebrate doing nothing and having no ambition. How to avoid the cult of Pennovation?

### Readings: Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*

Th. April 22: Guest: Angela Duckworth +Celina Tsu

# Week 14

T. April 27: Endings and Beginnings  
\*\*R Paper #2 Due\*\*

## PP: Flourishing

What is the role of happiness in a desirable life? Is the good life characterized by constant happiness? Can such a life also include despair? Are happiness and despair mutually exclusive, or can they be integrated in a life well lived?

### Readings:

- Boehm, Ruberton, and Lyubomirsky, 2017, The Promise of Fostering Greater Happiness (16/25)
- Faulkner, Hefferon, and Mutrie, 2015, Positive Psychology and Physical Activity (12/15)
- Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008, Happiness, Chapter 3 (18)
- Pawelski, in press, The Positive Humanities (35/42)
- Owens, 2020, The Future of Positive Psychology (9/12)
- David, Boniwell, and Conley Ayers, 2013, The Future of Happiness (4/5)

## R: We're All In This Together

Thinking about Beckett, radical empathy, productive suffering, whiskey, and beautiful sadness....and putting up with happy people.

### Readings: Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*

Th. April 29: James Pawelski and Justin McDaniel remix

May: 3: \*\*Integrative Essay #2 Due\*\*

Discussion Posts: Each week you will post a brief response to the readings and recorded lecture for each stream. You may share questions and/or comments on the material for that week. Alternatively, you may respond to what one or more of your classmates have posted. This online discussion will help you begin to process – individually and as a class – the material we will be covering that week, and it will give your instructors a sense of what you are thinking, helping them prepare for Tuesday classes. Your post for the happiness stream and your post for the despair stream are both due by 8:00 pm Eastern each Monday. On time, good faith efforts will receive full credit.

Signature Strengths Assignment: Before class on Tuesday, February 16 take the free, fifteen-minute VIA Character Strengths Survey at [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org). This survey will help you identify your top five “signature strengths.” In preparation for our discussion on Thursday, February 18, choose one of your signature strengths and use it in a new way every day.