

PL 376: Medieval Conceptions of Happiness

Seminar Leader: Tracy Wietecha
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Office Hours: Tuesdays after class

8 ECTS, 4 U.S. Credits
TR 9:00-10:30 a.m.

We will begin this seminar as a hybrid course. We will meet in-person on campus on Tuesdays and online via Zoom on Thursdays. We may change to meeting in-person on campus on both Tuesdays and Thursdays depending on the pandemic situation and guidelines for social distancing within the classroom. Please check your email regularly for updates.

Course Description

Happiness is often defined as a chief goal of human life, or as a state that can be achieved when striving for external affirmation is relinquished. A look at past traditions of thought on the subject reveals a diversity that goes far beyond contemporary conceptions, while also giving us an insight into their origin and development. This course explores Medieval conceptions of happiness as found in Islamic, Jewish, and Christian thinkers, such as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Tufail, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas. We examine the sources used by these authors, especially the influence of Ancient Greek philosophy, as well as the other concepts and values that played a role in their conclusions. Our aim will be to determine the degrees of continuity and difference between contemporary ideas of happiness and their medieval antecedents.

Required Texts

All students for the course are required to purchase the following texts. Please purchase the editions indicated by the ISBN.

- Course Packet
- Plato, *Meno*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, ISBN: 9781518664151
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2009) ISBN: 9780199213610
- Ibn Tufail, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale* (University of Chicago Press, 2009) ISBN: 978-0226303109
- Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism* (Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, Band 29) (University of Exeter Press, 2016) ISBN: 978-0822963974

- Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Happiness* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) ISBN: 978-0268018498

Books on Reserve at the Library

The following books are on reserve at the library. They will be helpful for further study and research for presentation topics or final paper topics. These books are, of course, just a selection. Students are encouraged to research on their own and talk with the instructor about further research materials.

- Joshua Parens, *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions: Introducing al-Farabi* (State University of New York, 2006)
- Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism* (Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, Band 29) (University of Exeter Press, 2016)
- Thomas Aquinas, trans. John A. Oesterle, *Treatise on Happiness* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984)
- Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Matthias Perkams (eds.), *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- Anthony Celano, *Aristotle's Ethics and Medieval Philosophy: Moral Goodness and Practical Wisdom* (Cambridge University Press, 2016)

Course Assessment and Assignments:

Presentation (30%): Each student will give one 20-minute presentation about a particular week's readings. Presentations should address the historical actor/philosopher, central questions and arguments of the text, three critically engaging questions on the text, and one question which engages course themes on continuity and discontinuity between medieval conceptions of happiness and contemporary conceptions of happiness. As all the students in the course will have read and prepared the course material for each class session, the student presentation should be more than a summary and dig deeper into the text (example: does the argument work? Is there something missing from the argument? Do you agree? Disagree? Why?) Students will sign-up for a presentation during the first week of class.

Participation (20%): Students are expected to come to class prepared, with assigned readings read and studied in advance to class. Class participation is very important for this course and students are expected to be ready to discuss assigned readings and philosophical issues during class. While attendance will be duly noted, attendance alone will not count as your participation grade. Come to class prepared, with the readings read in advanced. Ask questions, participate in the discussion. At midterm time, the instructor will give each student a participation grade so that each student is aware of their grade.

Final Essay (50%): The final essay for the course will consist of a 3000 word essay/12 page essay that philosophically addresses themes and readings of the course. The topic of the final essay is to be agreed upon by the instructor and the student. The student is also required to submit a prospectus (provisional title, outline, and bibliography) to the instructor. After the

prospectus has been submitted to the instructor, the student should arrange a meeting with the instructor during office hours or by appointment to discuss the instructor's feedback.

The instructor has set deadlines for the topic of the essay and the prospectus. The topic and prospectus, however, may be submitted at any time before the deadline. Students are highly encouraged to meet with the instructor during office hours or by appointment.

Deadlines:

Topic of final essay: Please have a topic for your final essay by November 11, 2020 via a meeting with the instructor during office hours or by appointment.

Prospectus: November 18, 2020 at the beginning of class. Please submit a hard copy to the instructor. The prospectus should include a provisional title, outline, and bibliography.

Final essay submission: December 16, 2020 by 12noon via email to the instructor (t.wietecha@berlin.bard.edu). Please email your final essay as a pdf document.

Attendance Policy

The instructor expects students to attend every class. Attendance will be taken and late arrivals will be noted. Each student is allowed two unexcused absences. The instructor reserves the right to lower a student's grade by half a grade mark for more than three unexcused absences. If a student has missed more than 30% of classes, no credit for the course will be given.

Special Considerations for Fall 2020

Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In this event, the student must contact the instructor by email. If possible, arrangements will be made for the student to join the class sessions remotely until in-person attendance is possible. When remote access to class sessions is not possible, the instructor will make other options available to the student, including the requirement of a reflection paper on the assigned readings. If a student has missed a class session and that class session was able to be recorded, the student will be required to listen to the recording and write a response paper. In all cases, the student should contact the instructor for the required assignments for a missed class session.

The instructor and all students must refrain from in-person attendance if feeling ill. In the event that the instructor is not feeling well, the instructor may choose to teach the course remotely. Students are asked to check emails for updates or alternative plans.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded up to one full grade (B+ to C+, for example). The instructor is not obliged to accept essays that are submitted later than 24 hours after the deadline. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students

are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Tentative Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading Assignment / Assignments Due
September 1	Intro to the course: What is happiness? Why happiness?	What are your philosophical questions about happiness?
September 3	Socrates and Plato: Can virtue be taught?	- Plato, <i>The Meno</i> , pp. 22-56 - <i>Happiness in Premodern Judaism</i> , pp. 10-14
September 8	Socrates and Plato: Moral Virtue and Happiness	-Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , Books II, IV (selections): course packet - Paul Bloomfield, "Good to be bad?": course packet
September 10	Aristotle: Happiness, Moral Virtue, and Human Nature	-Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book One, pp. 3-22 - <i>Happiness in Premodern Judaism</i> , pp. 14-23
September 15	Aristotle: Happiness and Virtue	-Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Books Two & Six, pp. 23-37, 102-117 - <i>Happiness in Premodern Judaism</i> , pp. 23-37
September 17	Aristotle: Two Kinds of Happiness?	-Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book Ten - <i>Happiness in Premodern Judaism</i> , pp. 37-47 Recommended: -Richard Kraut, "Two Conceptions of Happiness," 201-221 (available on JSTOR)
September 22	Medieval Islamic Philosophers: al-Kindi	-al-Kindi, <i>On Dispelling Sorrows</i> : course packet -"Al-Kindi," Podcast https://historyofphilosophy.net/al-kindī

		<p>Recommended:</p> <p>-“The Straight Path, Philosophy in the Islamic World,” Podcast https://historyofphilosophy.net/intro-islamic-world</p> <p>-“Arabic Ethics,” Podcast https://historyofphilosophy.net/arabic-ethics</p>
September 24	Medieval Islamic Philosophers: al-Farabi: Epistemology, Cosmology, and Ethics	<p>-“al-Farabi’s Psychology and Epistemology,” Section 4: Doctrine on the Intellect at <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/al-farabi-psych/#DoctInte</p> <p>-Joshua Parens, <i>An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions: An Introduction</i>, pp. 1-3: course packet</p> <p>-“Arabic and Islamic Psychology and Philosophy of Mind,” Section 2 al-Farabi at Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-mind/</p> <p>Recommended:</p> <p>-Charles Butterworth, “Medieval Islamic Philosophy and the Virtue of Ethics,” <i>Arabica</i>, T. 34, Fasc. 2 (July 1987), section on al-Farabi, 232-238 (available on JSTOR)</p>
September 29	Al-Farabi, cont.	<p>-al-Farabi, <i>The Attainment of Happiness</i>: course packet</p> <p>-Joshua Parens, <i>An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions: An Introduction</i>, pp. 103-108: course packet</p>
October 1	Al-Farabi, cont.	<p>-al-Farabi, <i>Book of Religion</i> in Alfarabi <i>The Political Writings</i> (ed. Butterworth), 93-113: course packet</p>
October 6	Avicenna	<p>-Avicenna, <i>Metaphysics of the Healing</i>, Bk. 9 and 10 (selections): course packet</p>

		<p>-“Ibn Sina [Avicenna],” Section 3 Logic and Empirism and Section 4 The Metaphysics of the Rational Soul; Practical Philosophy at Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-sina/#MetaRatiSoulPracPhil</p> <p>--“Arabic and Islamic Psychology and Philosophy of Mind,” Section 3 Avicenna at <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-mind/</p> <p>Recommended: -Charles Butterworth, “Medieval Islamic Philosophy and the Virtue of Ethics,” <i>Arabica</i>, T. 34, Fasc. 2 (July 1987), section on Avicenna, 238-247 (available on JSTOR)</p>
October 8	Averroes	<p>-Averroes on Plato’s <i>Republic</i>, 3-22 (selections): course packet</p> <p>-“Arabic and Islamic Psychology and Philosophy of Mind,” Section 4 Averroes at <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-mind/</p>
October 13	Ibn Tufayl	<p>-“Ibn Tufayl,” Podcast https://historyofphilosophy.net/ibn-tufayl</p> <p>- <i>Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale</i>, pp. 95-132</p>
October 15	Ibn Tufayl	- <i>Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale</i> , pp.133-166
October 20		Fall Break
October 22		Fall Break
October 27	Medieval Jewish Conceptions of Happiness: Maimonides	-“Maimonides’ Conception of Happiness,” in <i>Happiness in Premodern Judaism</i> , 192-198, 201-221, 231-245

		-“Ethics and Judaism,” Podcast https://historyofphilosophy.net/ethics-jewish
October 29	Maimonides, cont.	-“Maimonides,” Podcast https://historyofphilosophy.net/maimonides -Maimonides, <i>Guide to the Perplexed</i> (selections): course packet
November 3	Medieval Jewish Philosophers: Gersonides	- <i>Happiness in Premodern Judaism</i> , 343-373 -“Gersonides,” Podcast https://historyofphilosophy.net/gersonides
November 5	Gersonides, cont.	-Gersonides, <i>The War of the Lord</i> (selections): course packet
November 10	Medieval Jewish Philosophers: Hasdai Crescas’ Critique to Maimonideanism	- <i>Happiness in Premodern Judaism</i> , pp. 379-393 -Crescas, <i>Light of the Lord</i> (selections): course packet
November 12	Medieval Christian Philosophers: Albert the Great on Happiness and Perfection	Presentation by instructor -Anthony Celano: “Happiness, prudence, and moral reasoning in the latero works of Albert the Great,” in <i>Aristotle’s Ethics and Medieval Philosophy</i> , pp. 131-151: course packet -“Ethics in Albert and Aquinas,” Podcast https://historyofphilosophy.net/albert-aquinas-ethics -“Thirteenth Century Ethics,” Podcast https://historyofphilosophy.net/thirteenth-century-ethics
November 17	Medieval Christian Philosophers: Thomas Aquinas	-Jörn Müller, “Duplex Beatitudo,” in <i>Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 52-71: course packet -ST I-II Q. 1
November 19	Thomas Aquinas, cont.	-ST I-II Q. 2
November 24	Thomas Aquinas, cont.	-ST I-II Q. 3
November 26	Thomas Aquinas, cont.	-ST I-II Q. 4 and 5
December 1	Contemporary views of Happiness: Positive	- Big Think Interview with Tal Ben-Shahar https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgFfhJBQplk

	Psychology and some critics	-Barbara Ehrenreich, "Pathologies of Hope": course packet
December 3	Contemporary views of Happiness: cognitive science	-view movie "Inside Out" (95 min) -"The Science of Inside Out": course packet - Antonia Peacocke and Jackson Kernion, "Two Philosophers Explain What Inside Out Gets Wrong about the Mind": course packet
December 8	Is happiness the purpose of human life?	-Jordan Peterson, "Stop Chasing Happiness," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYT-dD1vN_A -"The Surprising Science of Happiness," https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_the_surprising_science_of_happiness
December 10	Continuity or discontinuity? Reviewing contemporary views in light of their medieval antecedents	Today, we will have a philosophical conversation to bring together all the contents and materials we have studied throughout this course.
December 15		Completion Week
December 17		Final Essay Due at 12noon (email as pdf to the instructor)

I. Select Bibliography

Primary sources:

Al-Farabi. *The Attainment of Happiness. Alfarabi: Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.* Tr., M. Mahdi. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.

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al-Kindi. "On Dispelling Sorrows." *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindi, Adamson & Pormann*, tr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Contra Gentiles.* Dominican House of Studies Priory of the Immaculate Conception. Trans. Vernon Burke. Thomas Aquinas' Works in English. <http://dhspriory.org/thomas/ContraGentiles3a.htm>.

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- Augustine. Letter 147. *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* vol. XXXXVIII. *S. Avreli Avgvstini Operum Sectio II S. Avgustini Epistulae*. Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1904.
- Averroes. *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics*. A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotles' Metaphysics, Book Lam. Leiden: Brill, 1986.
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- Avicenna. *The Metaphysics of the Healing*. Tr. Michael E. Marmura. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2005.
- Plato. *The Meno*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett
- *The Republic*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>
- Secondary sources:*
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- Celano, A. J. "The Concept of Worldly Beatitudo in the Writings of Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (April 1987), 215-226.
- Davidson, Herbert A. *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averroes, on Intellect*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
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- Elhajibrahim S. "Alfarabi's Concept of Happiness Sa'ada: Eudaimonia, The Good and Jihad Al-Nafs." 2006.

- Evans, C. Stephen. *Preserving the Person: A Look at the Human Sciences* (Regent College Publishing, 1994).
- Hasse, Dag. "Influence of Arabic and Islamic Philosophy on the Latin West," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-influence/>.
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- Krause, Katja. "Albert and Aquinas on the Ultimate End of Humans: Philosophy, Theology, and Beatitude." *Proceedings of the ACPA* 86 (2013): 213-229.
- Long, S. A. "On the Possibility of a Purely Natural End for Man," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 211–37.
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- Stevenson, Leslie, David Haberman, Peter Matthews Wright, Charlotte Witt, *Thirteen Theories of Human Nature* (Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Taylor, R. C., "Aquinas and the Arabs: Aquinas's First Critical Encounter with the Doctrine of Averroes on the Intellect, In 2 Sent. d. 17, q. 2, a. 1." *Philosophical Psychology in Arabic Thought and the Latin Aristotelianism of the 13th Century*. Luis X. López-Farjeat and Jörg Tellkamp, eds. Paris: Vrin 2013: 142-183.
- "Averroes' Philosophical Conception of Separate Intellect and God." *La lumière de l'intellect : La pensée scientifique et philosophique d'Averrès dans son temps*. Ahmad Hasnawi, ed. Leuven: Peeters 2011: 391-404.