# Philosophy and the Psychology of Happiness

Introduction: Humans are the only animals known to be able to mentally simulate the future to affect their own happiness. However, our ways of remembering the past and making future predictions is systematically prone to error. This has important implications for how we achieve happiness—something we all care about. Moreover, since happiness is a moral good, and since there are various ways we fail to know this good, then the ramifications are significant and philosophical. They bring up ethical questions about what we value and what we should value. They bring up questions of how we can know what is good. The topics touched on here are something we should care about insofar as human happiness is something we should care about.

Method: The class will consist of 16 meetings for about an hour each. We will be going through the book *Stumbling on Happiness* by Harvard psychologist, Daniel Gilbert. There are twelve chapters, and we will discuss a chapter every meeting for the first twelve meetings. Each chapter contains the author's summary and synthesis on research concerning the psychology of happiness. Moreover, the author imports philosophical views into the research, so we will also be analyzing the author's philosophy and how it interacts with the psychology. The last four days will be reserved for student planning and projects, where each will write out a thesis of their own choosing and defend it orally—conference style—in front of their peers. The thesis will have to be one that applies the information to some social, philosophical, or other important issue.

Objective: by the end of the course, the student will 1) know more about how the mind predicts its own happiness, 2) be more introspective, reflective, abstract, and rational, 3) have exposed herself to philosophical issues, 4) have matured intellectually and personally, 5) have increased self-confidence, personal satisfaction, and more love for learning.

Tentative Schedule: Week 1. March 3rd: chapter 1, Journey to Elsewhen. How the human brain learned to look forward in time. question: how do we know other minds?

Week 2. March 10th. Chapter 2. The view from here. Question: What is

happiness?

Week 3. March 17th. Chapter 3. Outside Looking in. Question: how well can we know ourselves through introspection?

Week 4. March 24th Chapter 4. In the Blind spot of the Mind's eye. Question: How do we know that the external world exists?

Week 5. April 7th. Chapter 5. The Hound of Silence. How the mind leaves out things in the future. Question: are there times in your life where you've made decisions based on limited predictions of what the future would be like? How will this affect your future decisions?

Week 6. April 14th. Chapter 6. The Future is Now. How current feelings affect our assessment of future events. Question: we need pre-feelings and yet they lead to error. How do we solve this problem?

Week 7. April 21st. Chapter 7. Time bombs. Discussion is continued.

Week 8 April 28th. Chapter 8. Paradise Glossed. How does the brain make the best of the bad. Question: If the brain makes us feel good about certain scenarios, then are they truly bad? Are our intuitions about right/wrong reliable?

Week 9 May 5th. Chapter 9. Immune to Reality. How people change their views to change how they feel.

Week 10 May 12th Chapter 10. Once Bitten. Tricks memory plays.

   Which is more important? Memory of an experience or the experience. How do we go about choosing?

Week 11 May 19th. Chapter 11. Reporting Live from tomorrow. Gilbert's solution is to learn from others. Is his solution defeated by the previous chapters?

Week 12 May 26th Chapter 12. Afterword. Summary. Question: what sounds true and what doesn't from the book?

Week 13 June 2nd Chapter 13.

Prewriting.

Week 14 June 9$^{th}$ Chapter 14.
Outline/writing

Week 15 June 16$^{th}$ Chapter 15. Student
presentations.

Week 16 June 23$^{rd}$ Chapter 16. Student
presentations.

Course
Book:

Gilbert, Daniel Todd. (2006) *Stumbling on happiness.* New York : A.A.
Knopf.