

Beau Weston		C330 (x8789)
Centre College	The Happy Society	Hours: 10:30 – 12:30; MWF
at the Hub Coffee House, Tuesday at my office		
Fall 2013	(SOC 321)	Phone: 238-7580 (h)

STARTING POINT

Aristotle says happiness is the highest aim of human life, the only end that is not a means to some other end. Happiness, he argues, is ‘an action of the soul in accordance with virtue.’ This will be our starting point and touchstone. The enduring question of how to make a happy *society* will occupy us the rest of the term.

TEXTS

Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*

Gretchen Rubin, *The Happiness Project*

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*

Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Barry Glassner, “Narrative Techniques of Fear Mongering” [Moodle]

Frank Furedi, “What Swine Flu Reveals About the Culture of Fear” [M]

Frank Furedi, “Fear Rules: Contemporary Fear Culture” [M]

Megan McArdle, “Are We More Afraid Than We Used to Be?” [M]

Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital.” [M]

Eric Uslaner, *The Moral Foundations of Trust*

Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*

David Halpern, *The Hidden Wealth of Nations*

Bradley Wright, *Upside: Surprising Good News About the State of Our World*

WORK

Journal (30% of final grade):

Write an entry after each class responding to what we have read, discussed, and done. Begin each entry with a quote from the text, which you will then expand on. This quote should either be a main point that the author was trying to make, or one you found especially perplexing. Turn these in through Moodle *each Saturday by noon* in a single word-processing file. I will return these through Moodle, with a response to each of your entries. You may respond to my responses, allowing a continuing dialogue in addition to our class and face-to-face discussions. I will use a minimal grading scheme – 4 for really exceptional journals, 3 for the great majority of good ones, 2 for correct but minimal and/or without a quotation, and 1 for

lame/sketchy/incomplete responses. Not skippable; not hard. [NOTE: ignore the percentage grade that Moodle assigns – I have my own, more normal grading scale.]

Acts of Kindness paper (10%; about 5pp)

From Monday, September 9 to Friday, September 20, perform a random act of kindness for others *each day* (twelve acts). Takes notes on what you did and what effect these actions had on your happiness and other people's happiness. We will discuss what you have learned in class on September 20. On Sunday, September 22 turn in a brief paper in which you describe each of your Random Acts of Kindness. Then, in your analysis of this project, relate your acts to Rubin's categories, and reflect on them as 'actions of the soul in accordance with virtue.'

Fear and Trust paper (10%; about 5pp)

Some attempts to persuade appeal to fear. For this project I want you to find and analyze an example from a 'fear entrepreneur's' campaign – whether in politics, in business, in religion, in social change organizations, or some other field. For example, a television ad, radio spot, or entire broadcast show may be devoted to creating or appealing to fear. Describe and analyze this example; if possible, describe the larger series or context that it is part of. Reflect on how this case might affect general trust. Discuss your project with me ahead of time.

Little Platoons project (25%; about 12pp):

In different ways, Durkheim, Haidt, and Tocqueville discuss how we build up society by acting in small groups. Edmund Burke says that we 'love the little platoon we belong to in society,' a passage we will discuss in class.

For this project, you will work with a partner to create a project in which you get *at least a dozen people to do something worthwhile, designed to increase their and other people's happiness*. You have pretty wide latitude about what this project could be. I encourage creativity. Each pair should meet with me before Fall Break to discuss what you are attempting.

Each pair will present the fruits of your project to the class, in a separate task that will be graded by the rest of the class (see below).

Each pair will write a paper about how well the project worked, and what you learned from it about happiness and well-being. Include your division of labor in the description of the project. Excellent papers will draw upon Haidt, Durkheim, and, especially, Tocqueville.

Little Platoons presentation (5%)

A ten-minute presentation to the class on what your pair did, what effect it had on the happiness of the platoon, and how it might have contributed to social happiness. Using a rubric (scoring sheet) that I will supply, you will each evaluate every other group's presentation. One pair will be designated ahead of time to ask the presenters a critical question about their project.

Final Exam (20%, about 10pp)

A comprehensive take-home essay on personal and social happiness. Key questions will concern what Halpern, Pinker, and Wright can show about the happy society. And it all comes back to Aristotle.

SCHEDULE

Introduction

- 9/2 What is the Happy Society?
- 9/4 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 1 & 2
- 9/6 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10

PART ONE: The Happy Person

- 9/9 Gretchen Rubin, *The Happiness Project*, Getting Started, & ch. 1 (40)
Organ Donor Event, 7p.m., Newlin Hall
- 9/11 Rubin, chs. 2 - 4 (75) [What “sets the weather” for her life? What sets the weather for your life?]
- 9/13 Rubin, chs. 5 & 6 (50)
- 9/16 Rubin, chs. 7 - 9 (70)
- 9/18 Rubin, chs. 10 - 12 (60) [What is her “most important priority”? What’s yours?]
- 9/20 Class discussion of what you learned from performing acts of kindness.
- 9/22 Acts of Kindness paper due 5pm (Sunday)

PART TWO: The Happy Group

- 9/23 Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, chs. 2 & 4 (50)
- 9/25 Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, chs. 5, 7, & 8 (90)
- 9/27 Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, chs. 9 & 10 (40)
- 9/30 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Bk. I, ch. 1; Bk. II chs. 1 & 7 (85)
- 10/2 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, Bk. III ch. 1, and ch. 2 sec. 5 (25)
- 10/4 Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, chs. 11 & 12 (65)
[Burke exercise in class]
- 10/7 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1 Introduction, Part I, chs. 2 & 3 (50)
- 10/9 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, Part II, chs. 6 & 9 (70)
- 10/11 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, Part II, chs. 1 - 18 (65)

- 10/14 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, Part III, chs. 1 – 4, 8 – 13 (40)
10/16 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, Part III, chs. 21, 22, 26; Part IV, chs. 6, 8 (40)
10/18 FALL BREAK

PART THREE: Fear and Trust, the Solvent and Glue of the Happy Society

- 10/21 “Culture of Fear” (film) – in class; no homework for today.
Look at about 20:00 to 40:00, or possibly 50:00
- 10/23 Wikipedia, “Moral Entrepreneur”
Glassner, “Narrative Techniques of Fear Mongering” (9)
Furedi, “What Swine Flu Reveals About the Culture of Fear” (6)
- 10/25 Furedi, “Fear Rules: Contemporary Fear Culture” (11)
McArdle, “Are We More Afraid Than We Used to Be?” (5)
- 10/28 Putnam, “Bowling Alone” (20) [M]
Uslaner, *The Moral Foundations of Trust*, ch. 1 (15)
- 10/30 Uslaner, *The Moral Foundations of Trust*, chs. 2 & 3 (60)
- 11/1 Uslaner, *The Moral Foundations of Trust*, chs. 4 & 7 (65)
- 11/3 Fear and Trust paper due 5pm (Sunday)

PART FOUR: The Happy Society

- 11/4 Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, Preface & ch. 4 (70)
- 11/6 Pinker, *Better Angels*, chs. 6 & 10 (105)
- 11/8 “Happy” film in class **in Vahlkamp** [Weston in DC]
- 11/11 Halpern, *Hidden Wealth of Nations*, Introduction and ch. 1 (60)
- 11/13 Halpern, *Hidden Wealth of Nations*, chs. 2 & 3 (65)
- 11/15 Little Platoon presentations [five @ ten minutes, in pairs]
- 11/18 Halpern, *Hidden Wealth of Nations*, ch. 4 (50)
- 11/20 Halpern, *Hidden Wealth of Nations*, ch. 6 (10)
- 11/22 Little Platoon presentations [five @ ten minutes, in pairs]
- 11/25 Little Platoon presentations [five @ ten minutes, in pairs]
- 11/27 THANKSGIVING BREAK
- 11/29 BREAK
- 12/2 Wright, *Upside*, chs. 1 – 4 (70)
- 12/4 Wright, *Upside*, chs. 5 - 7 (70)
- 12/6 Wright, *Upside*, chs. 8 – 10 (60)
- 12/13 Final Exam. Due at 10:00. Fun films will be shown; Burke’s donuts will be eaten.