ARE PHILOSOPHERS HAPPY?

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THREE KEY QUESTIONS

1. Are philosophers happy?
2. Are philosophers happier than non-philosophers?
3. Does practicing philosophy make people happier?

What do you think?
THREE DATASETS

1. Small New Zealand survey
   - Philosophical novices (33) vs Academic novices in a philosophy course (133)
   - Few questions on happiness

2. Very small New Zealand experiment
   - Philosophical apprentices (29 + 20) vs Apprentice historians (63)
   - Beginning and end of courses
   - Few questions on happiness

3. Large international online survey
   - Philosophical experts (96) vs “normal” people (96/thousands)
   - Lots of questions on well-being
1. ARE PHILOSOPHERS HAPPY?

Assessment strategies:

Ask some
- (they say “yes”, then some do a funny eye thing)
- (they say “no” if they are grading)

Put philosophers in brain scanners
- How do you think brain scans of happiness are calibrated?

Use psychological measures of happiness
- Question selection
- Individual questions vs multi-item measures
Philosophers are happy

All data are scaled to fit 0-10 range

- Intro ethics philosophy majors
- Upper level philosophy course
- Professional philosophers

% time happy
FoF last week: I'm happy
I'm a happy person
FoF last week: I'm enjoying life
Philosophers are satisfied, have self esteem, and are optimistic

- Satisfaction with life
- FoF last week: I’m as good as others
- FoF last week: I’m hopeful about future
- Confidence in living life full of happiness
- Optimistic about future circumstances

- Intro ethics philosophy majors
- Upper level philosophy course
- Professional philosophers
Overview of data on the happiness of philosophers

- Intro ethics philosophy majors
- Upper level philosophy course
- Professional philosophers

- Happiness
- Satisfaction with life
- FoF last week: I'm as good as others
- Optimism
- Importance of happiness
- Happiness cannot be changed
1. ARE PHILOSOPHERS HAPPY?

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Ask some
- (they say “yes”, then some do a funny eye thing)
- (they say “no” if they are grading)

Use psychological measures of happiness
- Question selection
- Individual questions vs multi-item measures

YES... but not very happy
2. ARE PHILOSOPHERS HAPPIER THAN NON-PHILOSOPHERS?

Assessment strategies:

Ask a few people
* (useless)

Use psychological measures of happiness on philosophers and (equivalent) non-philosophers
* Same measures as before
* Compare means (t-test, Levene’s test for equality of variance)
% of time philosophers and non-philosophers report being happy

Professional philosophers
Upper level philosophy course
Intro ethics philosophy majors
Intro ethics non-philosophy majors
Upper level history course
Professional non-philosophers
% of time philosophers and non-philosophers report being unhappy

- Professional philosophers: 26%
- Upper level philosophy course: 25%
- Intro ethics philosophy majors: 17%
- Intro ethics non-philosophy majors: 19%
- Upper level history course: 20%
- Professional non-philosophers: 19%
Philosophers are less happy in all 3 studies

- % time happy
- FoF last week: I’m happy
- I’m a happy person
- FoF last week: I’m enjoying life
- Happiness compared to peers
- % time not unhappy

Legend:
- Intro ethics philosophy majors
- Intro ethics non-philosophy majors
- Upper level philosophy course
- Upper level history course
- Professional philosophers
- Professional non-philosophers
Philosophers do "worse" in all 3 studies

- Happiness
- Satisfaction with life
- FoF last week: I'm as good as others
- Optimism
Philosopher's views on happiness change, while the others' views stay the same.
2. ARE PHILOSOPHERS HAPPIER THAN NON-PHILOSOPHERS?

**Assessment strategies:**

Ask a few people
- (useless)

Use psychological measures of happiness on philosophers and (equivalent) non-philosophers
- Same measures as before
- Compare means (t-test, Levene’s test for equality of variance)

No... they’re less happy
3. DOES PRACTICING PHILOSOPHY MAKE PEOPLE HAPPIER?
3. DOES PRACTICING PHILOSOPHY MAKE PEOPLE UNHAPPIER? OR ARE UNHAPPY PEOPLE ATTRACTED TO PHILOSOPHY?

Assessment strategies:

Compare the happiness reports of novice philosophers with their non-philosophy contemporaries

- Problem: Sample compares philosophy majors in an intro philosophy course with non-philosophy majors in the same course (as opposed to non-philosophy majors in a non-philosophy intro course)
Novice philosophers are a tiny bit less happy than equivalent non-philosophers

Only statistically significant difference

- Intro ethics philosophy majors
- Intro ethics non-philosophy majors
Does practicing philosophy make people unhappier? Or are unhappy people attracted to philosophy?

Assessment strategies:

Compare the happiness reports of novice philosophers with their non-philosophy contemporaries.

- Problem: Sample compares philosophy majors in an intro philosophy course with non-philosophy majors in the same course (as opposed to non-philosophy majors in a non-philosophy intro course).
3. DOES PRACTICING PHILOSOPHY MAKE PEOPLE UNHAPPIER?

**Assessment strategies:**

Ask experienced philosophers

- (useless)

Compare the happiness reports of philosophers at different “life stages” with each other

- Novice, apprentice, professional
- Problem: Hard to control for confounds (age, income, etc.)
- Problem: Structural bias based on different samples
Philosophers are less happy in all 3 studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Study 1 was at the start of second semester. Study 2 was at the start of summer semester. Perhaps people who do summer school spend less time being happy!
3. DOES PRACTICING PHILOSOPHY MAKE PEOPLE UNHAPPIER?

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* Novice, apprentice, professional
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Compare the happiness reports of philosophers at different “life stages” with equivalent non-philosophy groups… and then compare those comparisons
* Novice, apprentice, professional
* Problem: Control groups not perfect
More experienced philosophers are less happy but more satisfied than novice philosophers.
Overview of data comparing philosophers at different "life stages"

- Happiness
- Happiness compared to peers
- % time not unhappy
- Satisfaction with life
- FoF last week: I'm as good as others
- Optimism
- Importance of happiness
- Happiness cannot be changed

Comparison groups:
- Intro ethics philosophy majors
- Upper level philosophy course
- Professional philosophers
Differences between groups within studies (Scales 0-10)

- Happiness cannot be changed
- Importance of happiness
- Optimistic about future circumstances
- Confidence in living life full of happiness
- FoF last week: I'm hopeful about future
- FoF last week: I'm as good as others
- Satisfaction with life
- % time not unhappy
- Happiness compared to peers
- FoF last week: I'm enjoying life
- I'm a happy person
- FoF last week: I'm happy
- % time happy

The comparative (with equivalent non-philosopher group) differences get “worse” as experience with philosophy increases.
Differences between groups within studies (Scales 0-10)

Happiness cannot be changed

Importance of happiness

FoF last week: I'm hopeful about future

FoF last week: I'm as good as others

Satisfaction with life

FoF last week: I'm happy

Happiness, optimism, and importance of happiness "worsen" absolutely and relatively
Differences between groups within studies (Scales 0-10)

- Happiness cannot be changed
- Importance of happiness
- FoF last week: I'm hopeful about future
- FoF last week: I'm as good as others
- Satisfaction with life
- FoF last week: I'm happy

Relative differences in satisfaction with life decrease, but “professional” philosophers are not more satisfied than their comparators.
Differences between groups within studies (Scales 0-10)

Happiness cannot be changed
Importance of happiness
FoF last week: I'm hopeful about future
FoF last week: I'm as good as others
Satisfaction with life
FoF last week: I'm happy

Are we just more realistic? Perhaps we just lack the ~10% self-serving bias?
3. DOES PRACTICING PHILOSOPHY MAKE PEOPLE UNHAPPIER?

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  - Novice, apprentice, professional
  - Problem: Control groups not perfect
THE HAPPINESS OF PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHERS TRIAD OF TENSION

1. I am smart, so I make effective prudential decisions
2. Happiness is important
3. I chose something that makes me less happy
THE HAPPINESS OF PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHERS TRIAD OF TENSION

1. I am smart, so I make effective prudential decisions
   - I am smart, but not about making prudent career decisions

2. Happiness is important

3. I chose something that makes me less happy
THE HAPPINESS OF PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHERS TRIAD OF TENSION

1. I am smart, so I make effective prudential decisions

2. Happiness is important
   • No, satisfaction, truth, knowledge, etc. are

3. I chose something that makes me less happy
THE HAPPINESS OF PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHERS TRIAD OF TENSION

1. I am smart, so I make effective prudential decisions

2. Happiness is important

3. I chose something that makes me less happy
   ▪ No, happiness cannot be changed
   ▪ No, only the saddest students become professionals
WHY MIGHT PHILOSOPHY MAKE US LESS HAPPY?

It doesn’t, it just makes us report being less happy

- We are realistic (we see ourselves and the world as they really are)

We choose not to focus on it as much because we value it less

The truth hurts, and we love truth

We don’t have the attitudes, or perform the behaviors, conducive to happiness
PHILOSOPHERS reported statistically significantly “worse” scores on all of these (and better on none):

- Positive relations with others
- Personal growth
- Environmental mastery
- Using strengths
- Pleasure and meaning paths to happiness
- Gratitude
- Savoring (sensing, absorption, behavioral expression, counting blessings)
- Flow
Philosophy seems to attract less happy students and then makes them less happy (or encourages the less happy ones to continue)

Cross-cultural and longitudinal research needed to further verify these results

It might not be as bad as it seems:

- We might just be realistic
- We might rightly be pursuing other goods