

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

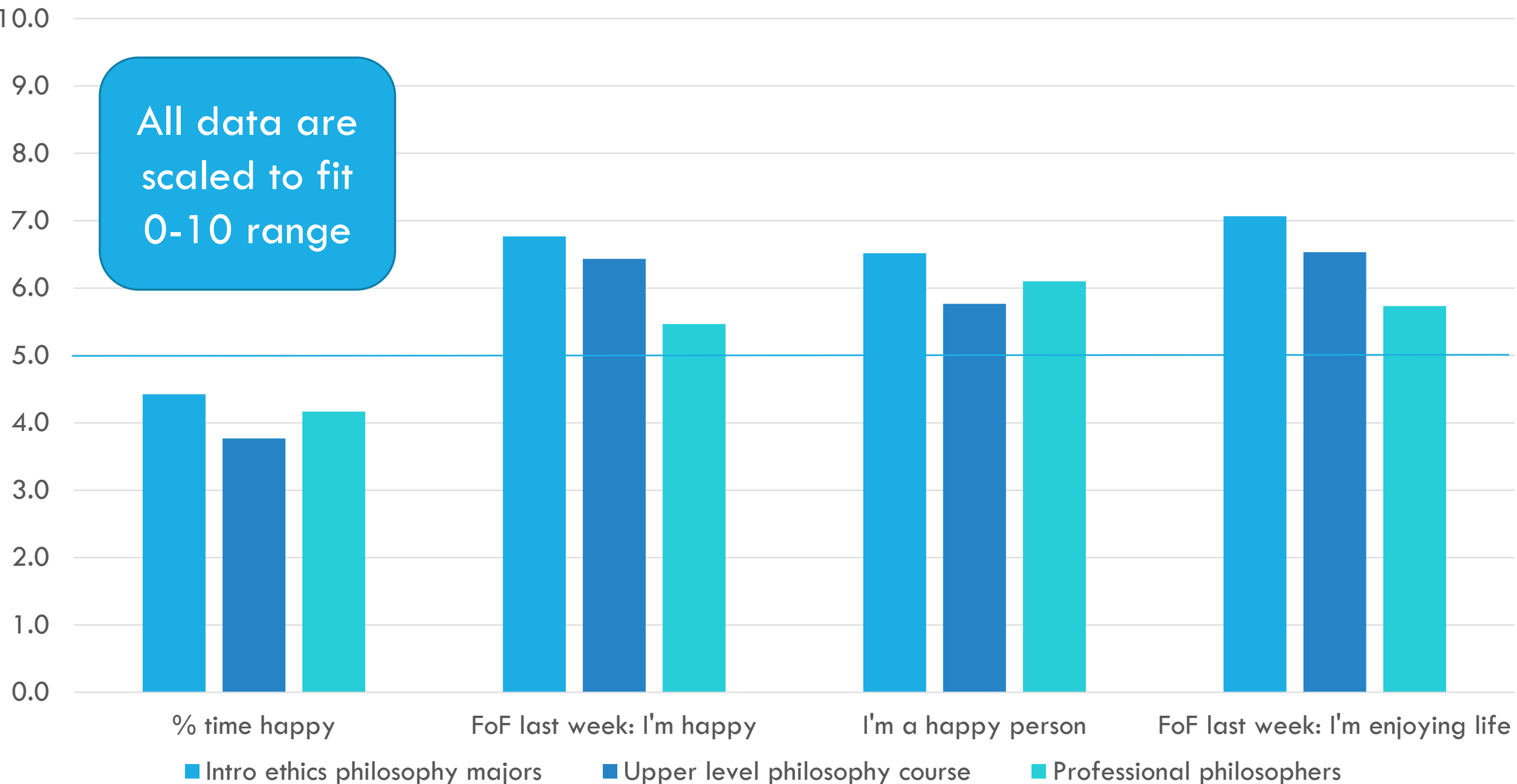
- How do you think brain scans of happiness are calibrated?

Use psychological measures of happiness

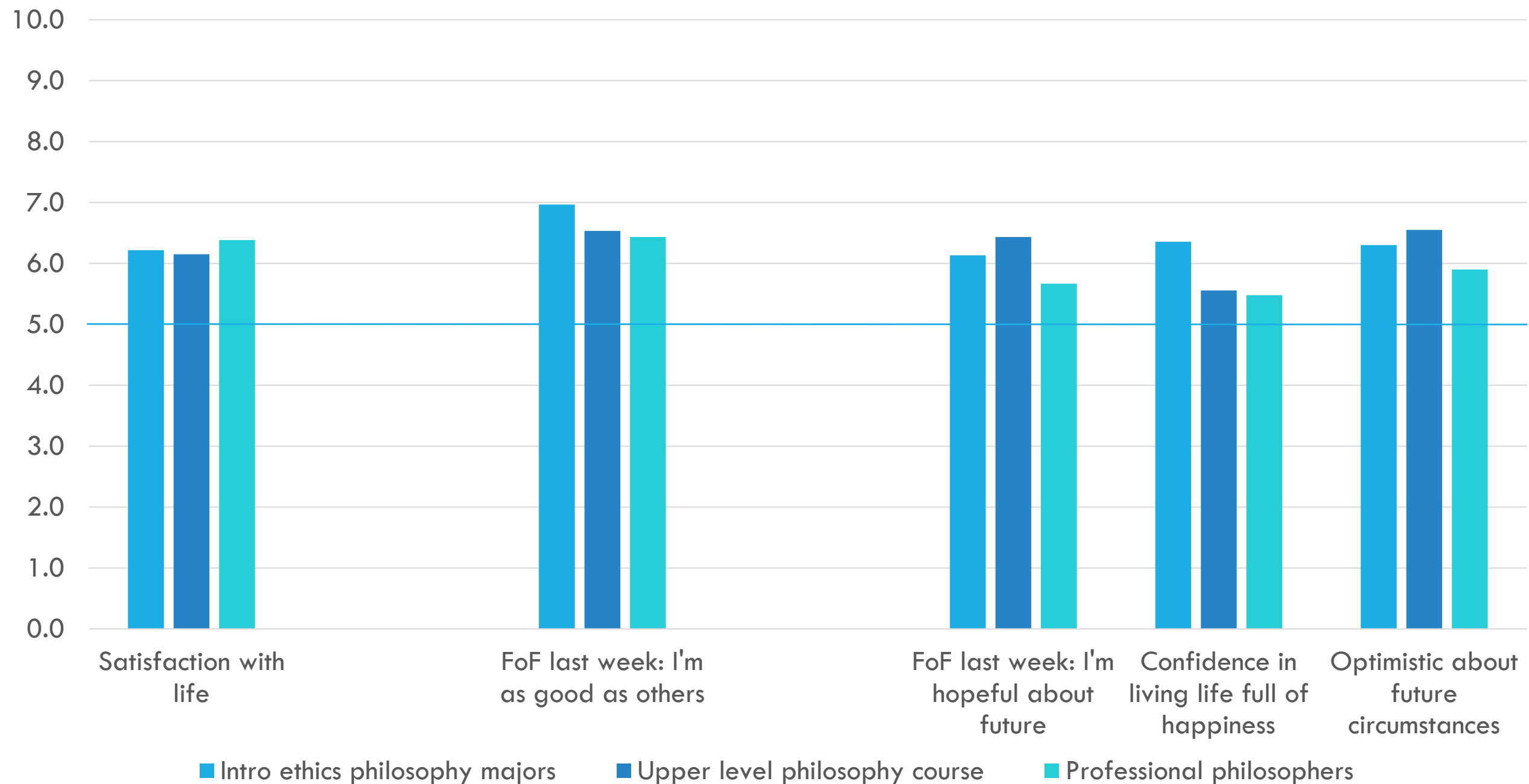
- Question selection
- Individual questions vs multi-item measures

Philosophers are happy

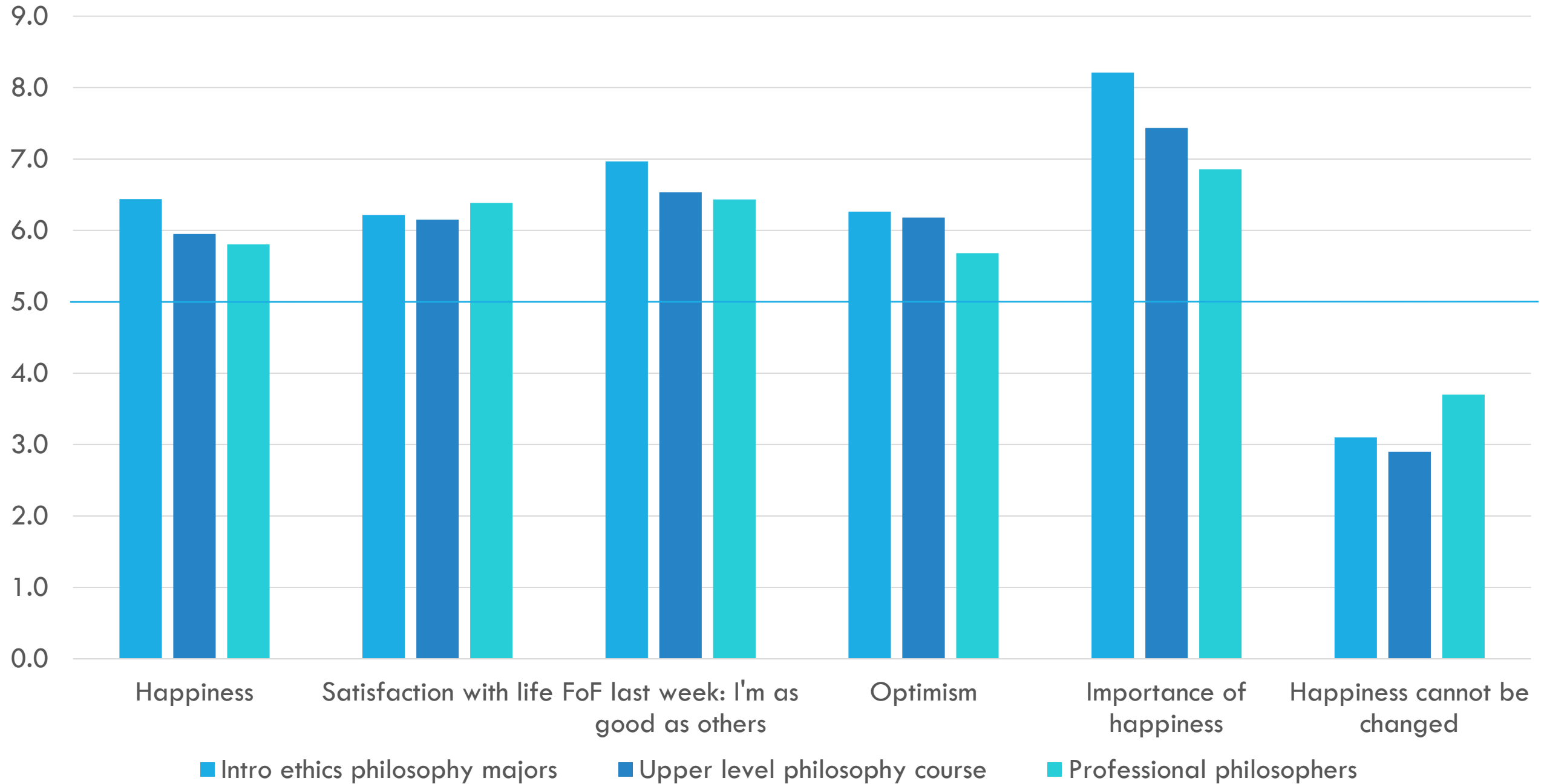
All data are scaled to fit 0-10 range



Philosophers are satisfied, have self esteem, and are optimistic



Overview of data on the happiness of philosophers



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:

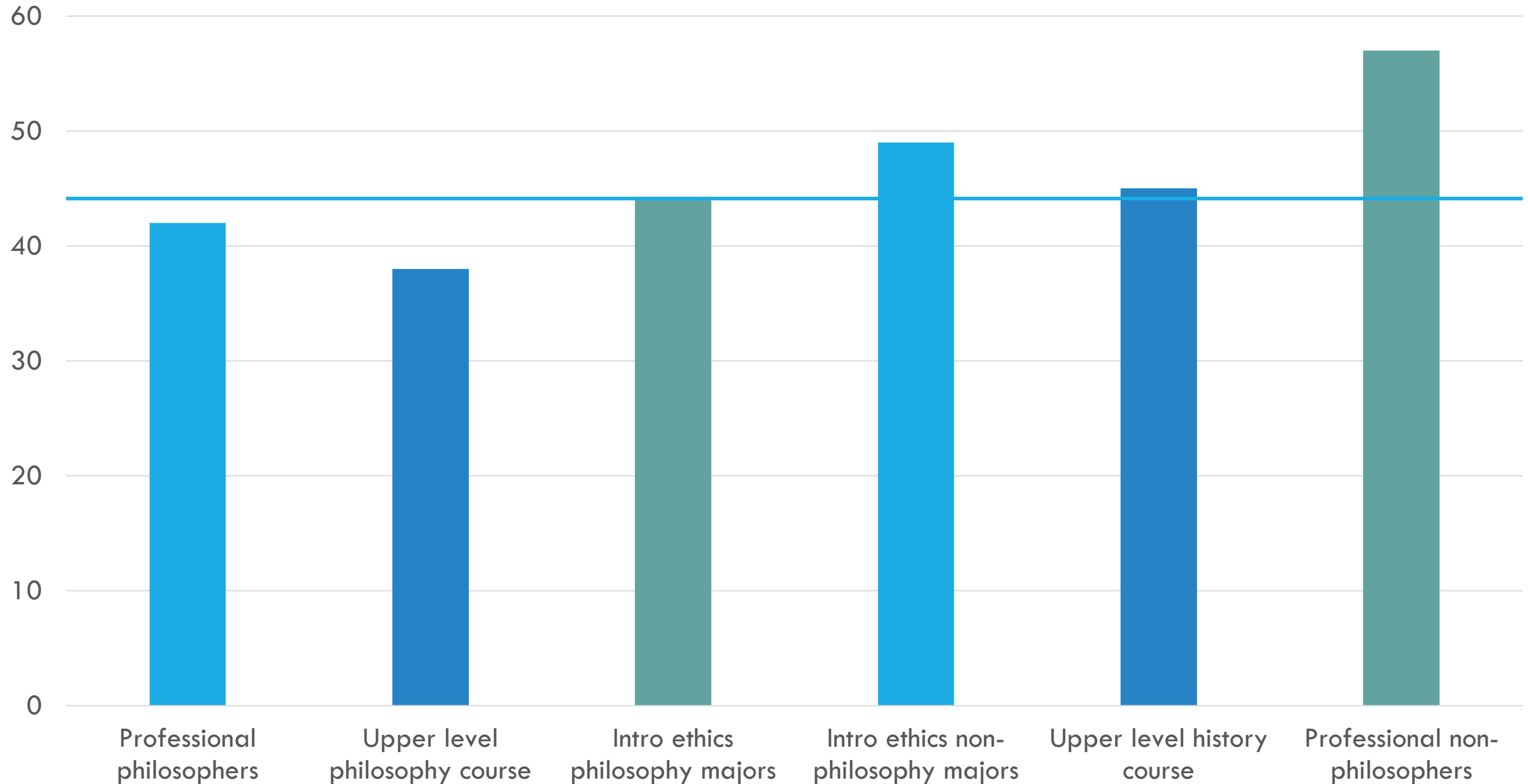
Ask a few people

- (useless)

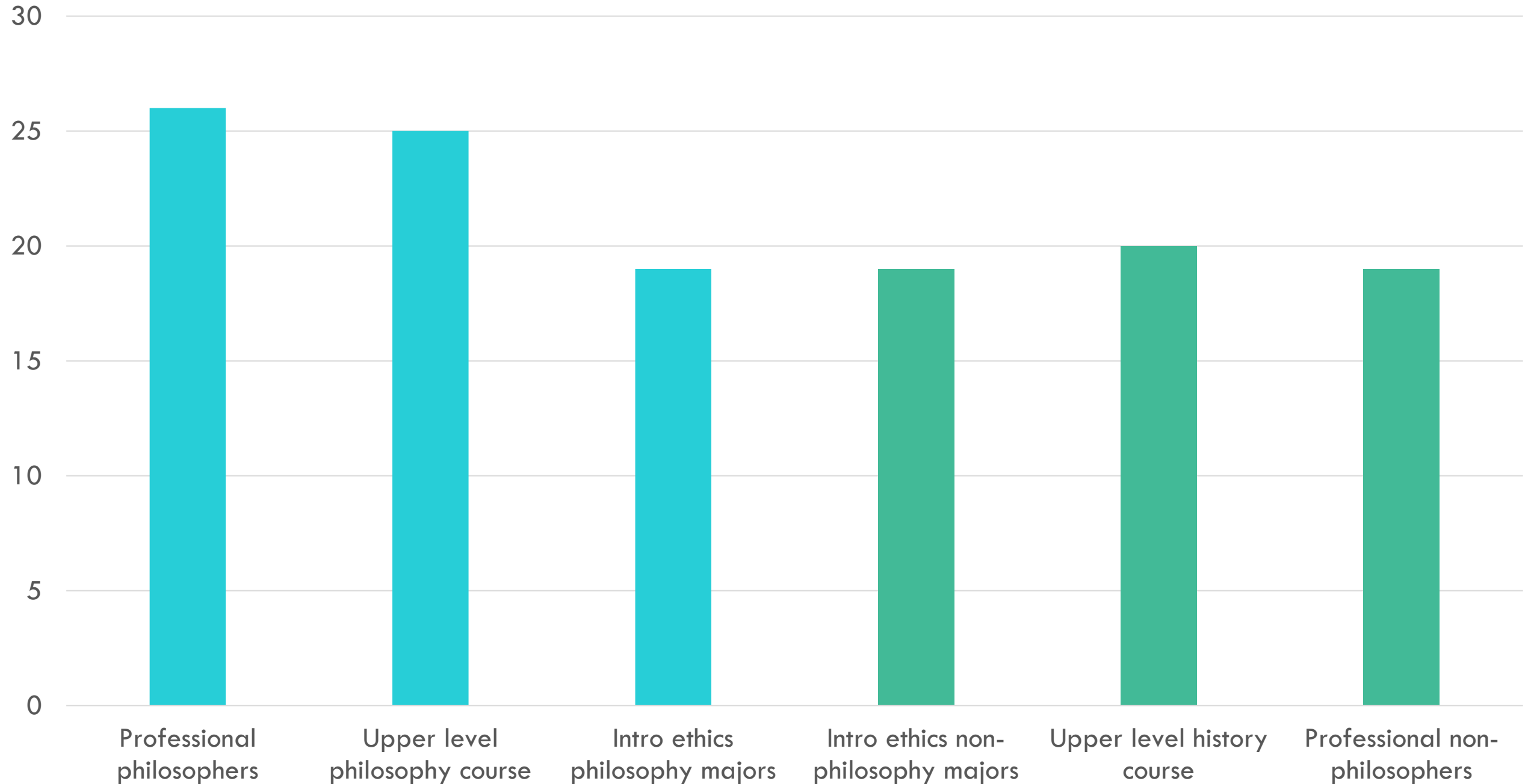
Use psychological measures of happiness on philosophers and (equivalent) non-philosophers

- Same measures as before
- Compare means (t-test, Levene's test for equality of variance)

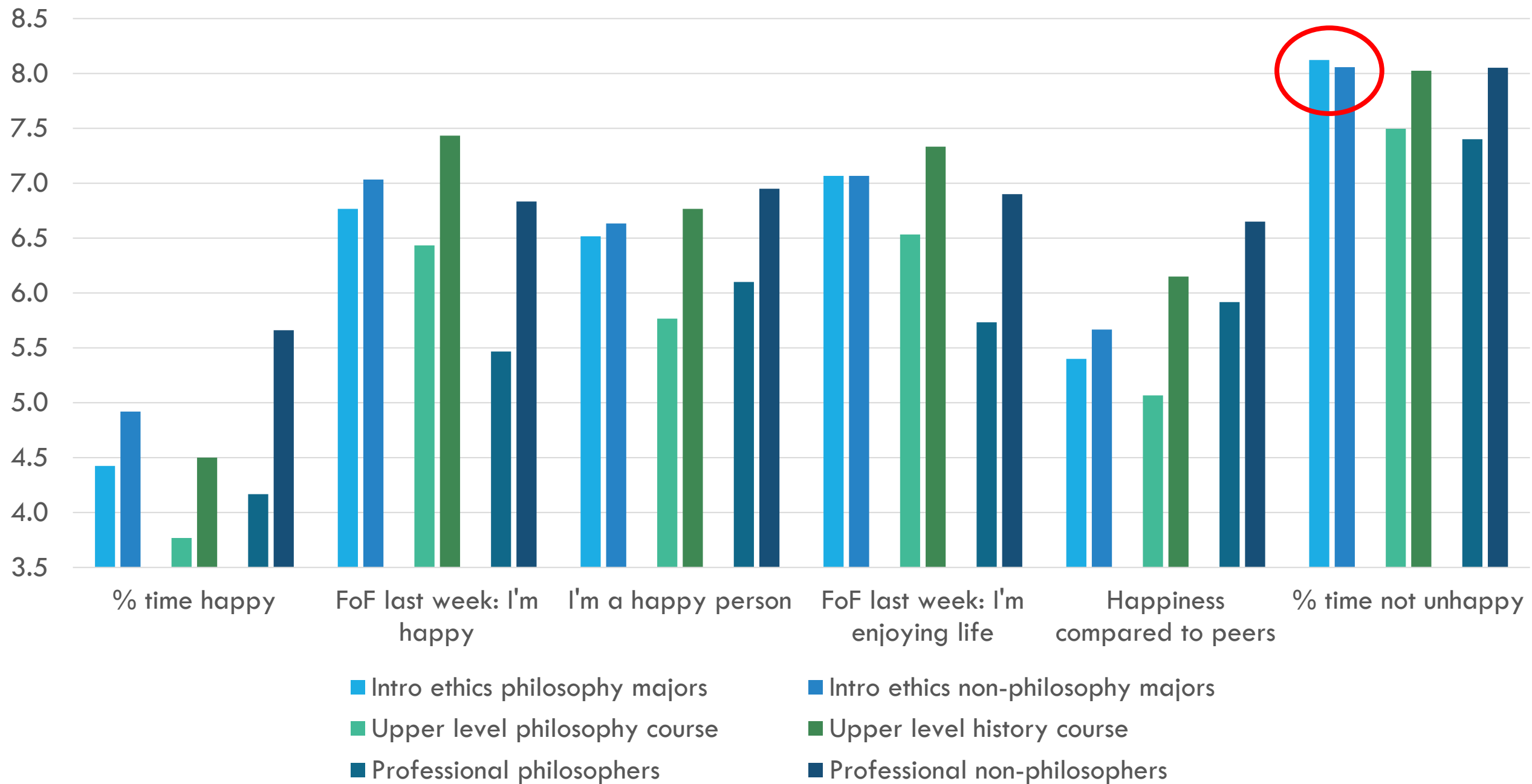
% of time philosophers and non-philosophers report being happy



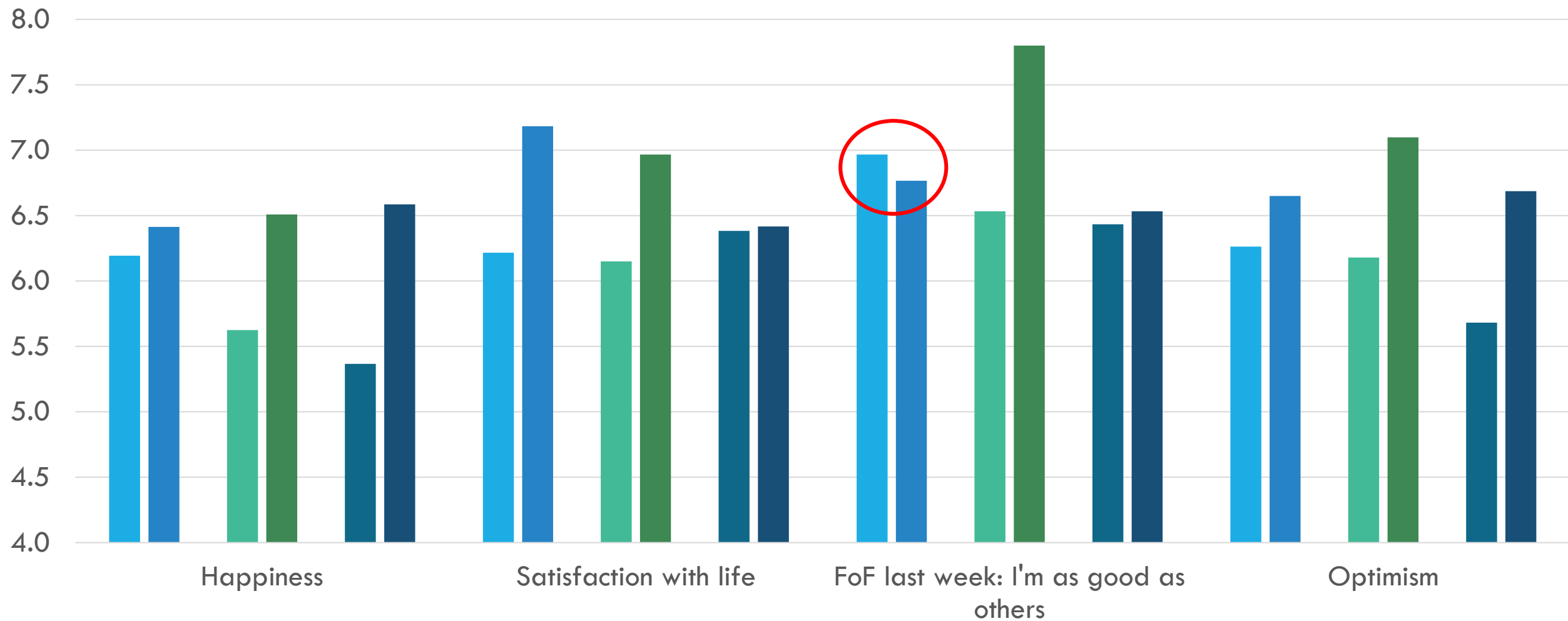
% of time philosophers and non-philosophers report being unhappy



Philosophers are less happy in all 3 studies



Philosophers do "worse" in all 3 studies



Intro ethics philosophy majors

Intro ethics non-philosophy majors

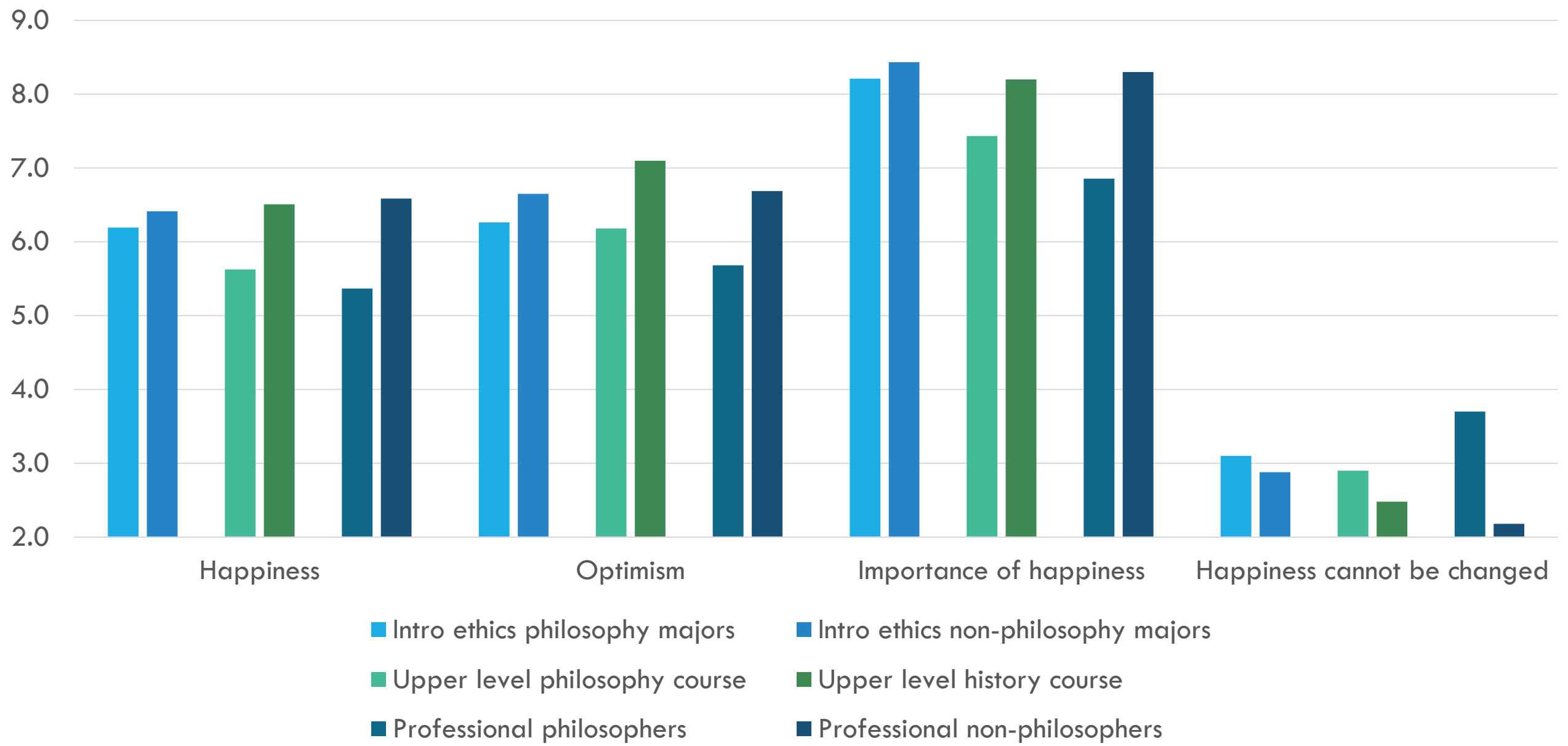
Upper level philosophy course

Upper level history course

Professional philosophers

Professional non-philosophers

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?

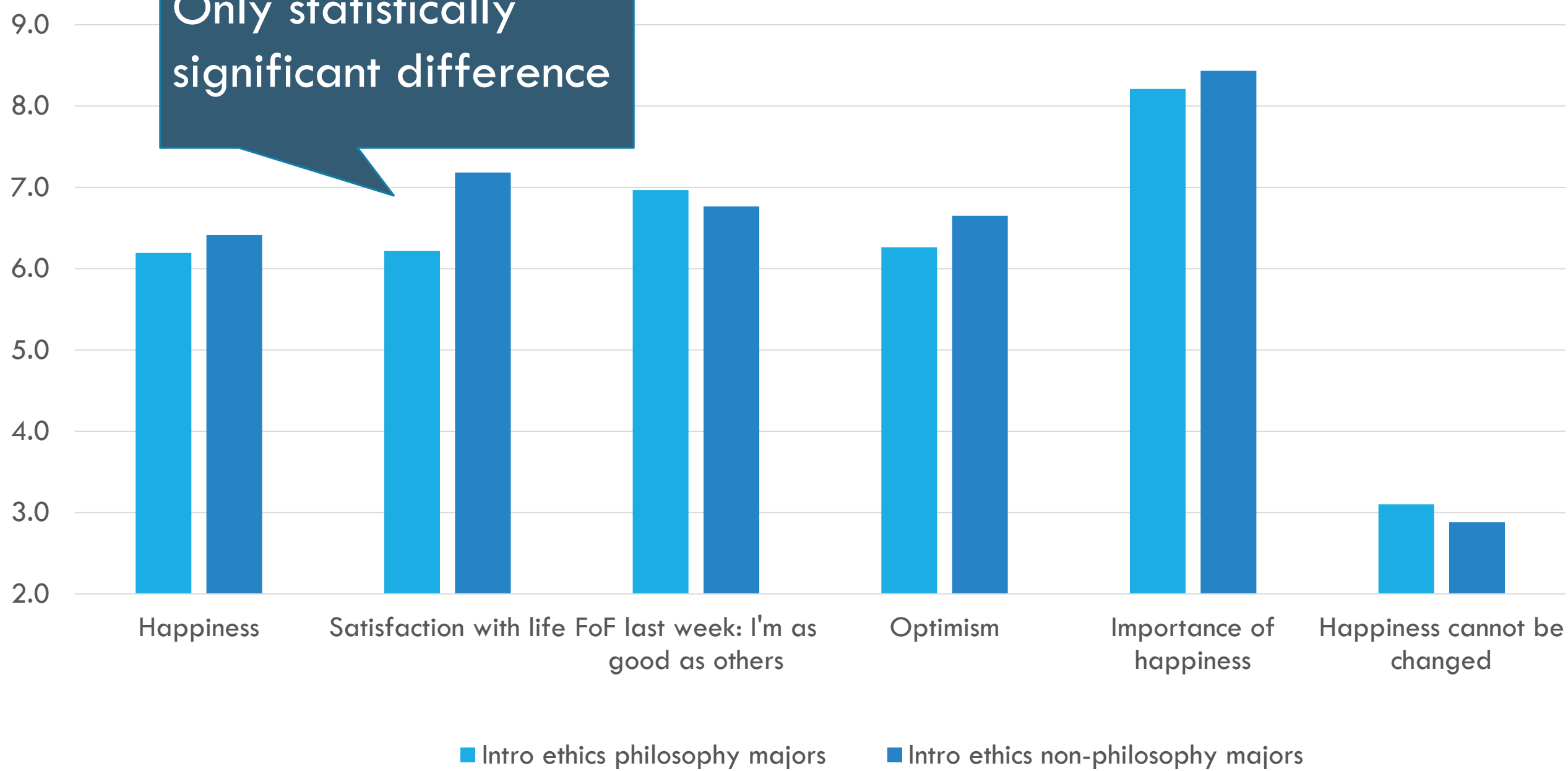
Assessment strategies:

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



~~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)

Maybe a little... but this doesn't explain enough

3. DOES PRACTICING PHILOSOPHY MAKE PEOPLE UNHAPPIER?

Assessment strategies:

Ask experienced philosophers

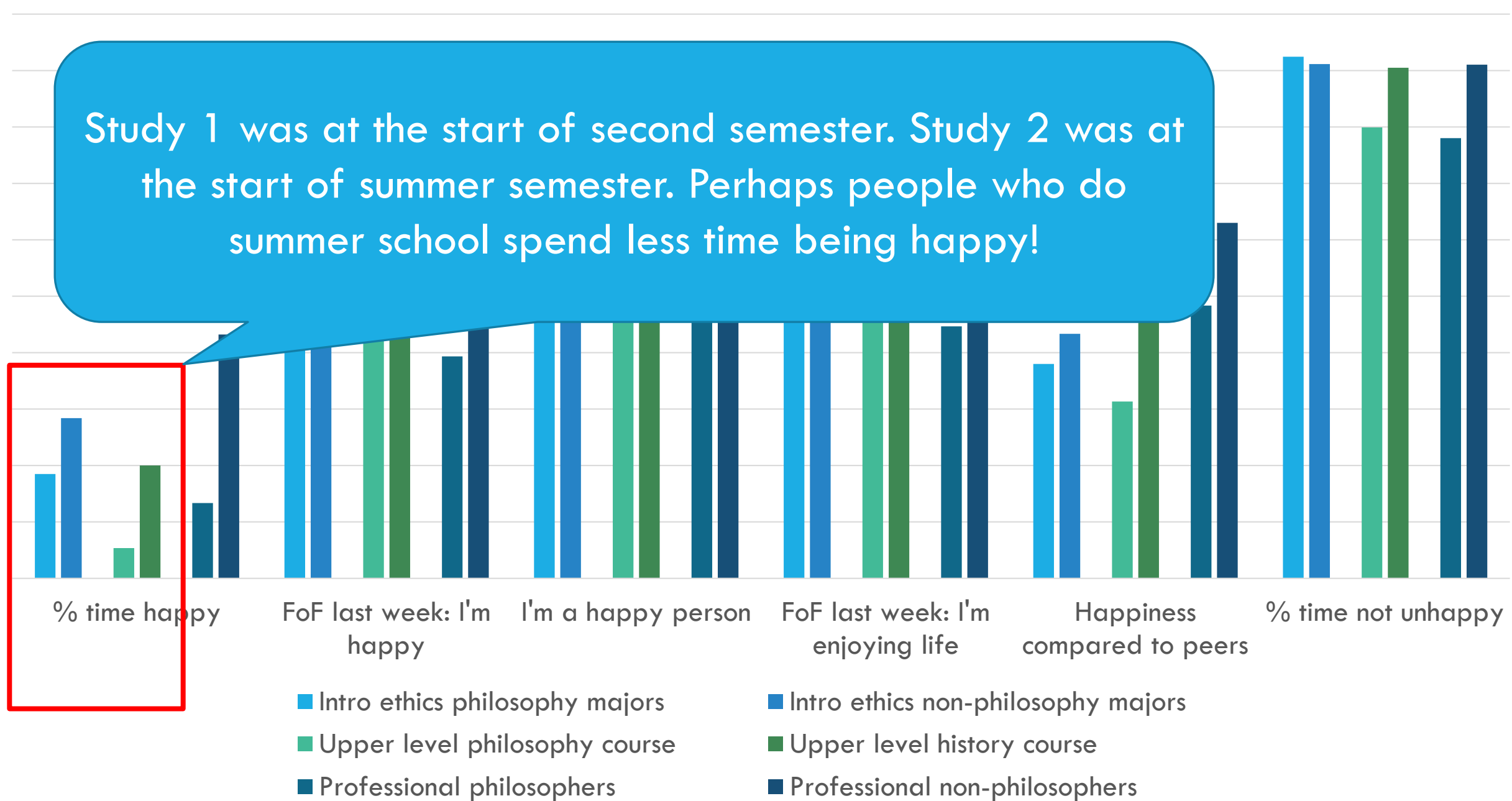
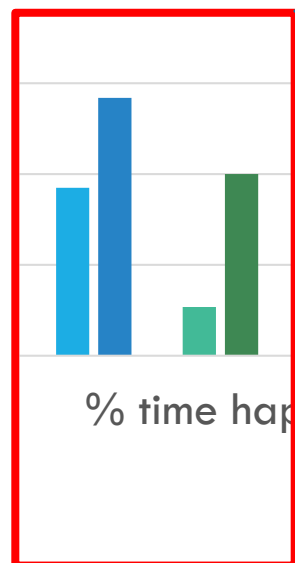
- (useless)

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

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!



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

3. DOES PRACTICING PHILOSOPHY MAKE PEOPLE UNHAPPIER?

Assessment strategies:

Ask experienced philosophers

- (useless)

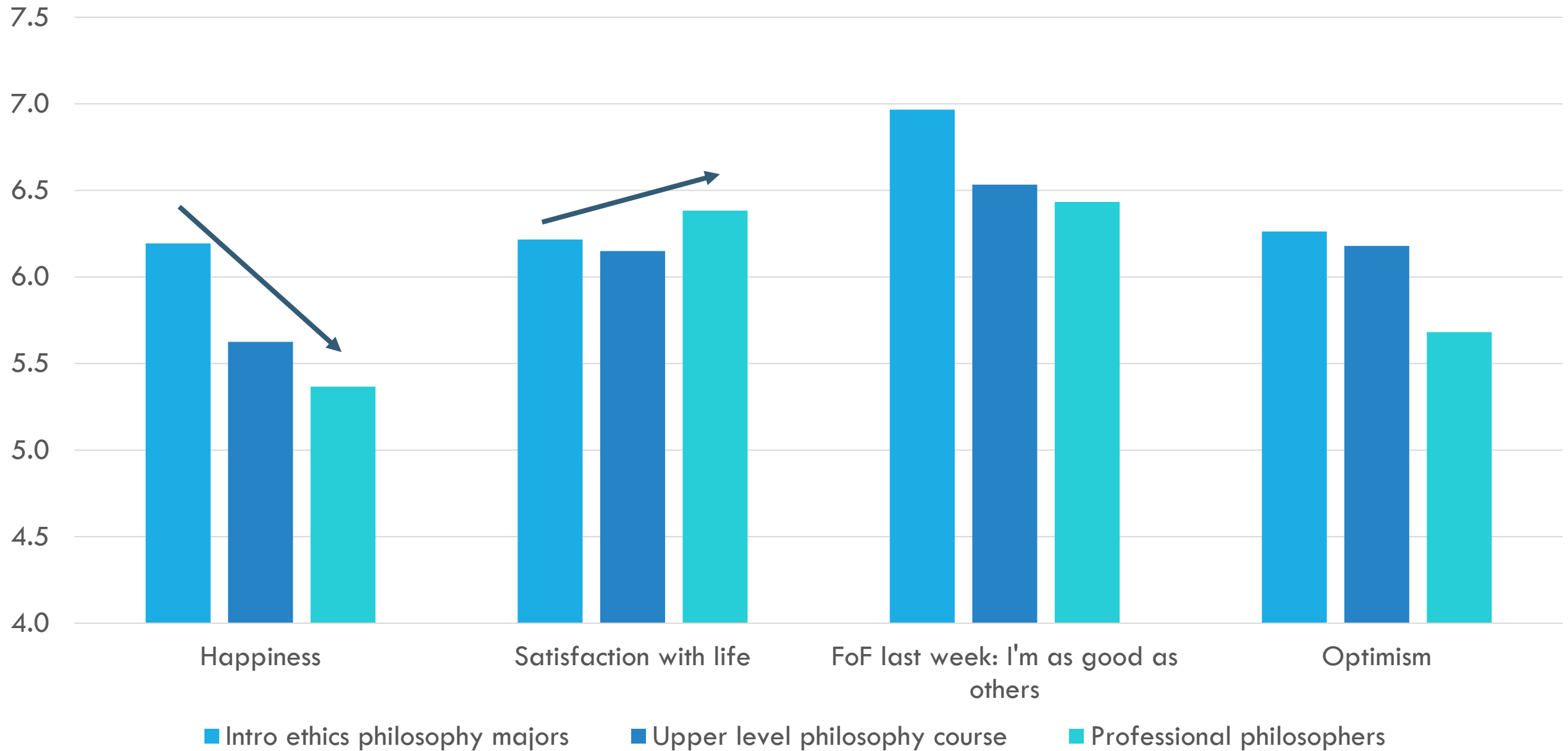
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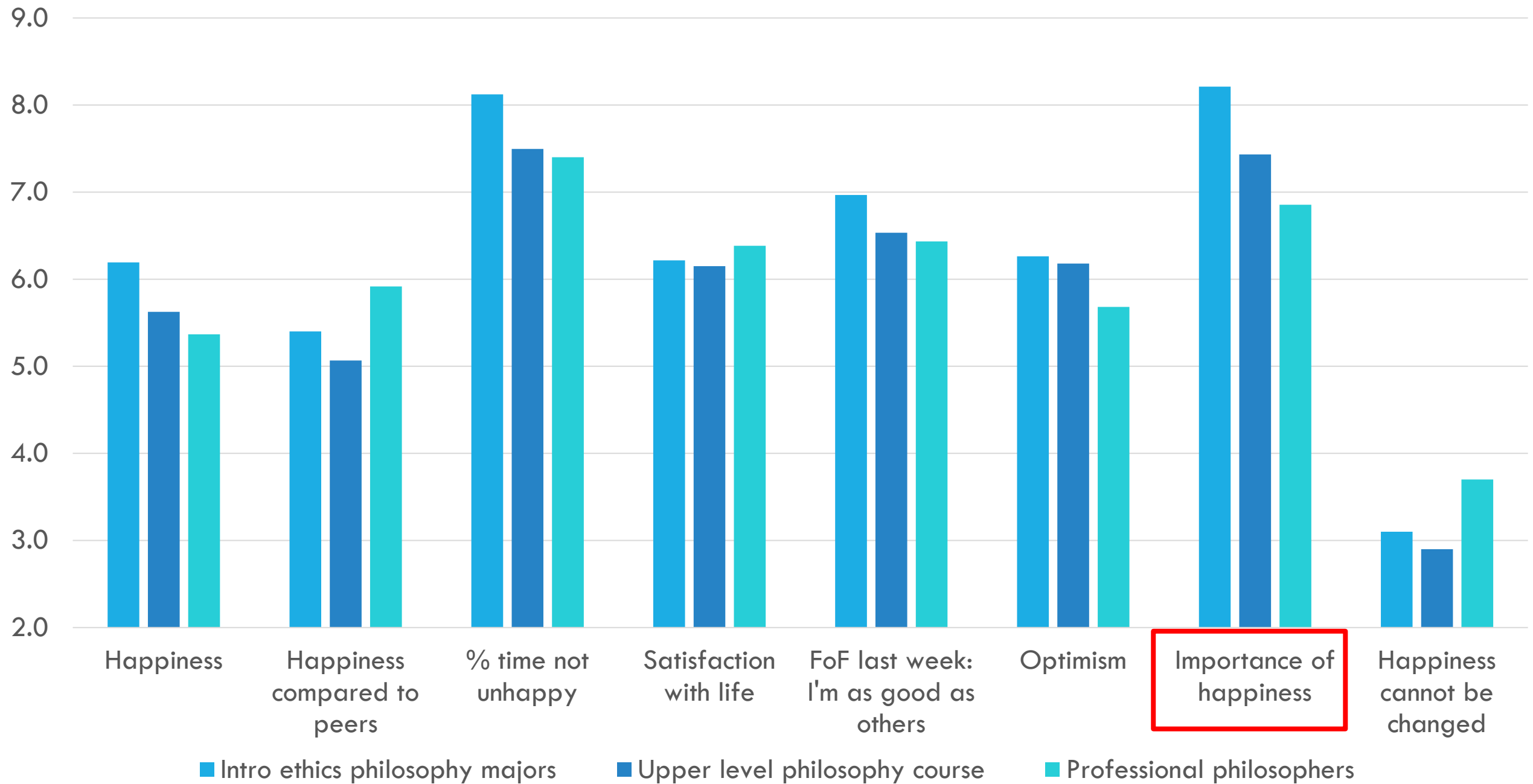
Compare the happiness reports of philosophers at different “life stages” with equivalent non-philosophy groups... and then compare those comparisons

- 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"



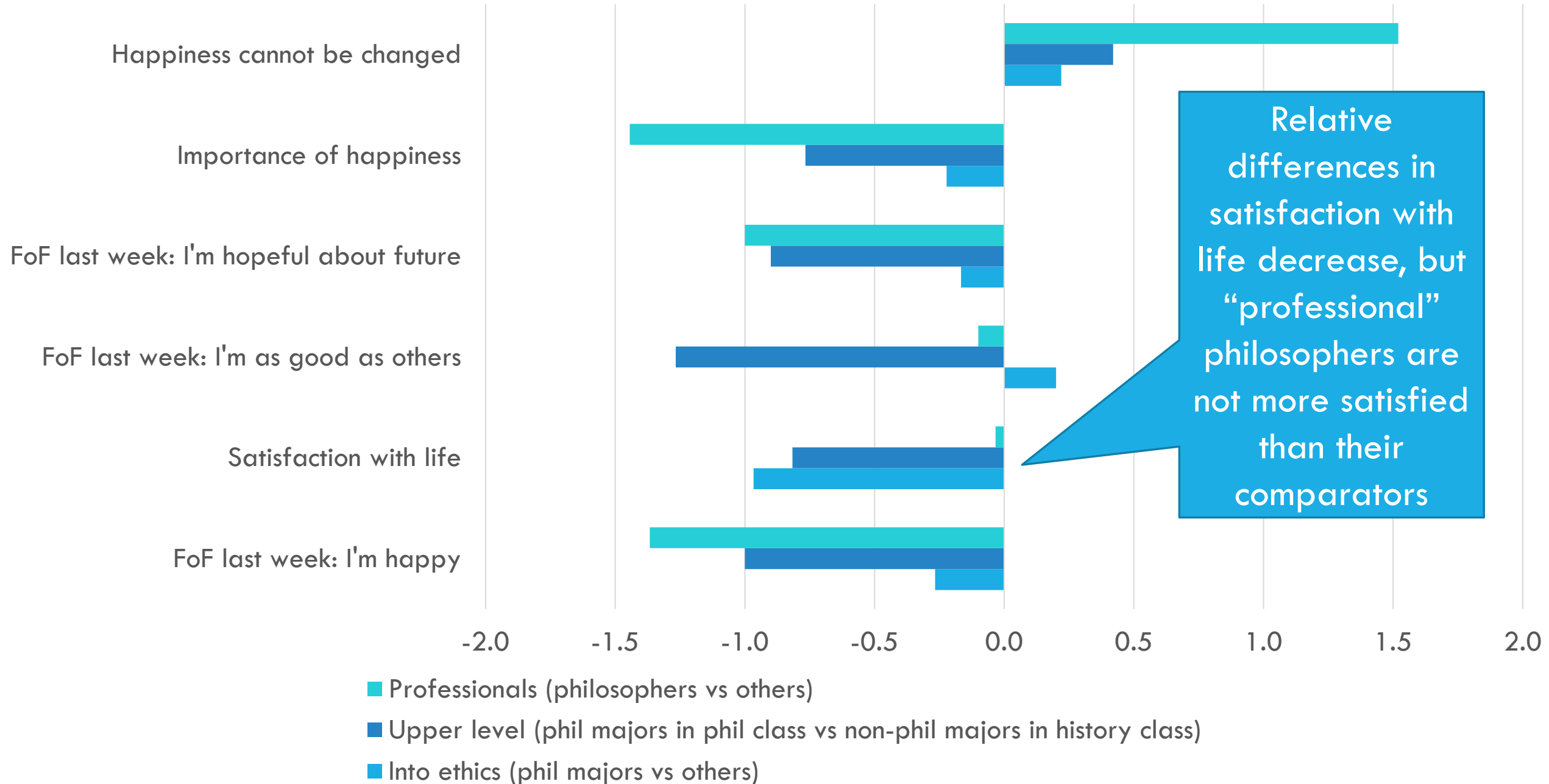
Differences between groups within studies (Scales 0-10)



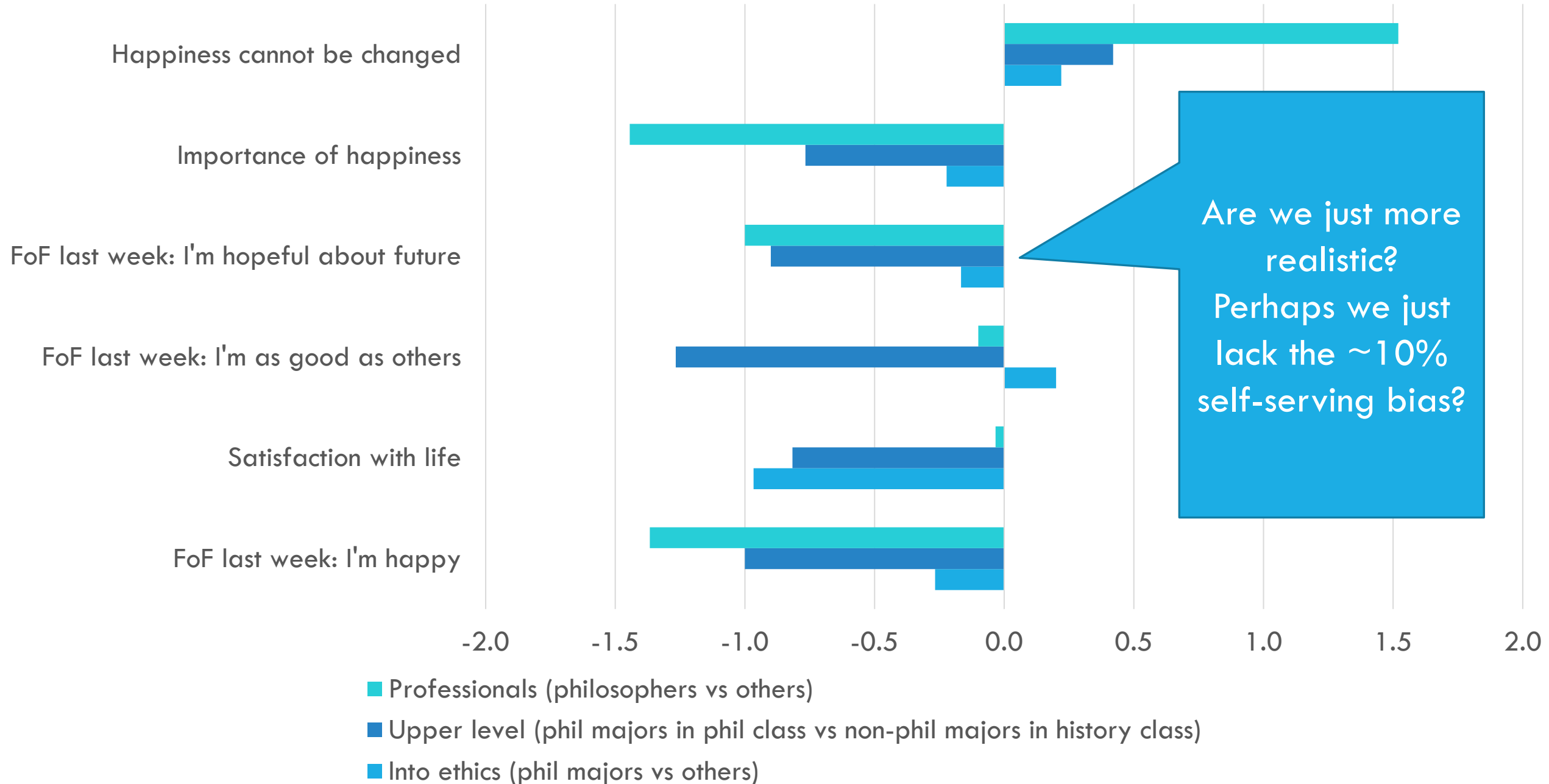
Differences between groups within studies (Scales 0-10)



Differences between groups within studies (Scales 0-10)



Differences between groups within studies (Scales 0-10)



3. DOES PRACTICING PHILOSOPHY MAKE PEOPLE UNHAPPIER?

Probably!

Assessment strategies:

Ask experienced philosophers

- (useless)

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

- 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

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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

STUDY 3: EXTRA DETAIL: WHY ARE WE UNHAPPY?

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

END

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