



IMPACT Symposium 2014

Fall 2014

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The Happiness that Matters

Dan Haybron - Saint Louis University

September 11th 2014, 5:30 p.m., McCord Auditorium, Dallas Hall

Is the “happiness” that happiness researchers study an important kind of happiness? Should it be a major life goal or policy concern? Contemporary views of happiness tend to split into two camps: “judgment” theories, which define happiness as being satisfied with your life, and “feeling” theories, which define happiness as a positive emotional condition. Judgment theories tend to dominate the scientific research, yet life satisfaction views cannot explain the importance we place on happiness. “Emotional state” views, by contrast, make better sense of our interest in being happy.

Professor Dan Haybron from Saint Louis University will sketch a portrait of happiness understood in this way. He will also discuss his finding, that happiness is a rich and complex psychological phenomenon, which plays a central role in a good life and a good society.

Happiness and the Law: Applying Happiness Research to Legal Policy, Legal Education, and Legal Practice

Peter Huang - University of Colorado Law School

September 19th 2014, 5:00 p.m., McCord Auditorium, Dallas Hall

This talk provides a brief introductory survey of modern happiness research and considers how happiness research can inform legal policy as well as improve legal education and legal practice. Dr. Huang will explore two conditions under which law should care more about experienced happiness versus remembered happiness and develops connections among being happy, being ethical, and being mindful.

The Politics and Polemics of Happiness: Back to Postwar Future

Mary Esteve - Concordia University

September 25th 2014, 5:00 p.m., McCord Auditorium, Dallas Hall

In the world of social science and neurobiology the status of happiness is largely settled: as contemporary society’s uppermost value, it is a utility that affirms itself. Mainstream media’s routine reporting, say, on the latest “Gross National Happiness” survey has done much to shore up the science of happiness’s self-aggrandizement. Yet this widespread cult of happiness has generated a good deal of opposition among postmodern cultural theorists. As a pervasive structure of feeling, so the argument often goes, happiness perpetuates compulsory social norms and privileges proprietary bourgeois hegemony. From a liberal-democratic standpoint, however, these critics turn out to reinforce rather than unsettle the status of

happiness as a value unto itself. This talk argues that postmodern theory collaborates with happiness science in segregating the value of happiness from important dimensions of normative politics, specifically, from social welfare policy and distributive justice. The talk examines the parallel ascendance in the 1980s of happiness science's disavowal of everything political and postmodernism's displacement of welfare economics by a politics of recognition and/or radical technofuturism. The talk then turns to the post-WWII origins of contemporary happiness studies, from which, it suggests, we might learn a thing or two. It concludes with a discussion of certain postwar social theorists and cultural critics, including welfare economists, who understood the political virtue of clustering (rather than segregating) questions of happiness together with questions of economic and social justice.

Happiness and the Brain

Kent Berridge - University of Michigan

October 2nd 2014, 5:00 p.m., McCord Auditorium, Dallas Hall

Can neuroscience help shed light on happiness? At present, affective neuroscience is beginning to identify some of the brain's wellsprings for peak states of hedonic happiness. The hedonic approach may also serve as an entry to exploring brain bases of meaningful life satisfaction, because hedonic happiness (taking pleasure in life) tends to correlate with eudaimonic happiness (positive meaning in life). Understanding how brains generate happy states might eventually point the way to understanding what happens in some lucky individuals who become more persistently happy.