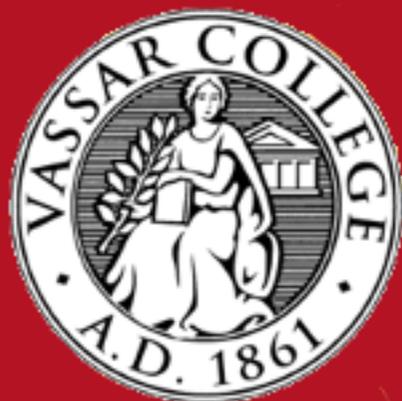

VASSAR COLLEGE JOURNAL
OF PHILOSOPHY

VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 1 • SPRING 2014
The Good Life



THE VASSAR COLLEGE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Janet Kanzawa • Daniel Kessler • John Nguyen

EDITORIAL BOARD

Derek Butterton
Spencer Davis
Erin Leahy
Marlena Santos
Nikolas Schonsheck
Clement Stormes

FACULTY ADVISOR

Giovanna Borradori



Authorization is granted to photocopy for personal or internal use or for free distribution.
Inquiries regarding all types of reproduction and subscriptions can be addressed to: The
Vassar College Journal of Philosophy at philosophyjournal@vassar.edu.

THE VASSAR COLLEGE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
Issue I, Number 1
Spring 2014

This journal is dedicated to Jamie Greenberg, Vassar College Class of 2012, who passed away on April 4, 2013. He was our peer, fellow philosopher, and a role model for us all.

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	iv
Introduction	1
Team 10 and Levinas: Building Toward Utopia <i>Natalie Phillips</i>	2
Non-Present Non-Action: The Good Life in the <i>Zhuangzi</i> <i>Michael Norton</i>	14
In the Pursuit of Happiness: A Review of Positive Psychology and Research on Happiness <i>Andrew Jounq</i>	26
Practical Philosophy: A Review of William Irvine's <i>A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy</i> <i>Derek Butterton</i>	39
The Winter is Over, But Whence Spring?: A Review of Antonio Negri's <i>The Winter Is Over</i> <i>Spencer Davis</i>	43
Deconstructing the Good Life: Interview with Michael Murray <i>Daniel Kessler & Marlana Santos</i>	47
Call for Papers	58

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Vassar College Journal of Philosophy owes the success of its inaugural issue to a number of exceptional individuals and organizations. Above all, the Journal is indebted to the assistance and counsel of Philosophy Department Chair, Professor Giovanna Borradori, without whom this initiative would never have gotten off the ground. The Journal is also grateful to the Vassar Philosophy Department as a whole for its continued encouragement and material support, and to the Vassar Student Association for providing a major source of funding for its publication. Our special thanks go to Professor Emeritus of Philosophy Michael Murray for his willingness to be interviewed. Finally, we would like to thank all those who submitted to the Journal, without whom there would be no Journal to speak of.

INTRODUCTION

The Vassar College Journal of Philosophy emerged out of a desire to provide a platform for undergraduate thought and engagement with compelling themes of philosophical interest. Two undergraduate philosophy journals have previously been published at Vassar, and, though they form a tradition that gives context to this most recent iteration, the Vassar College Journal of Philosophy is intended to be an entirely new beginning. The motivating theme of the Journal is inclusion: as an undergraduate publication that is interested in broadening the boundaries of the philosophical field, the Journal has a focus on exploring philosophically important topics from the perspective of diverse disciplines.

This year's theme, "The Good Life" runs in currents within both Eastern and Western thought, and is immensely important in the history of philosophy. While the notion of "The Good Life" has strong Aristotelian connotations, its borders are open to questioning by a nearly endless array of disciplines and interests. The hope of the Board is that this issue of the Journal will serve to generate greater engagement with the question of what a good life entails, from the distinct perspective of the undergraduate population.

TEAM 10 AND LEVINAS: BUILDING TOWARD UTOPIA

Natalie Phillips
Vassar College, Class of 2014
Philosophy

Abstract

The devastation of World War II posed the question of what it means to reconstruct not only buildings and cities, but the conditions of possibility of the polis. In this postwar climate, a number of thinkers in both philosophy and architecture called for a radical interrogation of the nature of social relations as well as the human bond. French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and the architectural collective Team 10 responded to this call with a strong utopian vision, based on the convergence between an unconditional appreciation of the singularity of human beings and a critique of the technocratic worldview endorsed by late modernism. As Team 10 and Levinas emerged from a European society barely recovering from unspeakable acts of atrocity, they provided a stunningly similar critique of human subjectivity, assumed as autonomous and self-sovereign agency. The claim of this essay is that Team 10's project of a "utopia of the present" may be the society Levinas envisioned under the sign of shalom: a polis in which the ideal of the good life is a construction in which doors are perennially open.

TEAM 10 AND LEVINAS: BUILDING TOWARD UTOPIA

Natalie Phillips
Vassar College, Class of 2014

In the aftermath of WWII, with entire cities in Germany and Japan leveled to rubble, the rebuilding of the *polis* became the site for a radical reimagining of the human self, both individually and collectively. The question of what it means to reconstruct, and for whom, naturally raised the issue of what type of construction existed in the first place. “Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then we can build,” wrote Martin Heidegger in his celebrated meditation on the nature of the abode. But what does dwelling actually mean? What role does the ground, the earth as the foundation of all dwelling, play in the project of building a home for ourselves? And is there a distinction to be drawn between a radically virgin, or unbuilt ground, and a built one? Can we think of construction *ex nihilo* or is construction always already reconstruction? These are some of the questions that philosophers and architects pursued in their interrogation of that ancient dream of the Western political community known as the good life.

In this essay, I am going to explore two very different answers to the question of post-WWII reconstruction by French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and the architectural collective Team 10. Levinas and Team 10 reacted separately yet simultaneously to WWII, the Holocaust, and the technocratic direction of modernism as they demanded that philosophers and architects reevaluate their conceptions of the self and their relation to the world around them. Levinas’s experiences as a Jewish soldier and prisoner of war during the Holocaust came to characterize his writings, as he produced a post-Holocaust reimagining of ethics and ontology. Team 10 united under a similar mission: to realize a new system of postwar ethics through the rebuilding of the city.

The core members of Team 10 originally began meeting at the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Modern (CIAM), an organization formed in 1928 that served as a platform for

prominent architects who sought to spread the principles of modernism. “Team 10” became the nickname for the younger generation of architects that were meant to revive the CIAM, and the group continued to meet as an independent collective after the CIAM disbanded in 1959 (Risselda). Due to the ambiguous nature of membership and the diverse architects that participated in the group over time, I will focus on the ideas and principles that emerged from Team 10 immediately after their break from the CIAM. I will pull selections from the “Team 10 Primer” to articulate the ways in which Emmanuel Levinas and Team 10 produced similar understandings of ethics, being, and the good life. Ultimately, I will argue that Team 10’s vision acts as an architectural realization of Levinas’s ethical ontology, as the postwar city became the site for the reconstruction of nothing less than the human subject.

For the members of Team 10, modernism presented an inadequate expression of human relations, social spaces, and ultimately, the good life. Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck argued that modern architecture had become obsessed with its own technique, “applying on a purely technical, mechanical, and decorative level, not the essence but what was gleaned from it in order to give the pretense of moving more effectively” (Smithson 374). Modern architecture had forsaken its essential role in accommodating the dynamic needs of society in favor of a shallow aesthetic and form-based technical dogma. For Van Eyck and the rest of Team 10, society’s ever-changing relations of individual and community still “move along the same old groove,” but modern architecture had resorted to the same techniques and principles “for the last 30 years” (Smithson 374). Many architects had become occupied with the superficial procedures and traditions of modern architecture, losing sight of the world they were building for and falling behind the epoch of the times.

The members of Team 10 each expressed a frustration with architects who were continuously retreating into the stagnant and technical doctrine of modernism. As Spanish architect Jose Antonio declared in 1961,

“We need thousands and thousands of architects to think less about ‘Architecture,’ money, or the cities of the year

2000, and more about their trade as architects. Let them work tied by a leg so that they cannot stray too far from the earth in which they have their roots or from the men they know best” (Smithson 37).

Architects had to cease to concern themselves with formal ideas of “Architecture” so that they could recover the inherently social essence of building. Jose Antonio’s critique of modernism recalls Levinas’s ontology, in which he is suspicious of traditions that approach being as something that is self-evident and self-oriented. Many members of Team 10 were dissatisfied with modern architects who approached architecture as “that which is in and for itself,” (Levinas 105). This means that modern architects conceived of architecture as existing apart from society, continuing to build not for the community but for the sake of architecture itself. For Team 10, the modern architects who approached architecture as an isolated craft had rendered the act of building “sterile and academic, literally abstract”—elevated in a self-obsessed ivory tower and ultimately losing sight of its place in the community (Bakema 374). Levinas would argue that modern architecture’s occupation with itself and persistent referral to its own formalist doctrine serve to “affirm the fact of remaining in oneself, returning to oneself, positing oneself as a oneself, as the sense of the world, as the sense of life” (105). When Team 10 launched their attack on modernism, it was not merely a discursive critique. Their criticism acted as a Levinasian re-imagining of the being of architecture not as an isolated technical art form, but rather as rooted in the social world.

For Team 10, modern architecture’s alienation from humanity was rooted in an ontological orientation that was negligent of ethics. As Polish architect Jerzy Soltan posits, “superficial bourgeois modernism in architecture, supported by some superficial trends in other plastic arts of today, is of the utmost danger to the sanity and health of the city planning and building” (Smithson 47). Modernism’s emphasis on form and function led to a mode of architecture that was purely for the sake of building, as many architects concerned themselves with sleek grid-like forms, industrial utility, and machine-like efficiency in their buildings, defying architecture’s fundamental moral

responsibility to the community. As modern architects continued to espouse functionalist doctrine and reproduce the same socially out-of-touch spaces, they displayed a disregard for community that acted as a disavowal of ethics more broadly. As Levinas posits, “ethics arises in the relation to the other,” who “straightaway imposes himself upon my responsibility: goodness, mercy, or charity” (115). Neglect of this prior responsibility to the other negates the very possibility of ethics or goodness. For Team 10, modern architecture’s atomistic notion of the human as an autonomous and fundamentally selfish agent denied this fundamental interconnectedness with and responsibility for society, which would have rendered the reconstruction of the traditional modernist *polis* a threat to the good life.

The architects of Team 10 thus called for “a new beginning” for architecture in society. In the Team 10 Primer, published in 1962, the group declared its mission of “inducing, as it were, into the bloodstream of the architect an understanding and feeling for the patterns, the aspirations, the artifacts, the tools, the modes of transportation and communications of present-day society, so that he can as a natural thing build towards that society’s realization-of-itself” (Smithson 3). Team 10 sought to ground the very being of architecture in its social essence, as society shapes architecture and architecture helps society actualize itself. This new beginning for architecture, however, was not simply an ideological re-orientation or a rhetorical set of principles. In order for architecture to embody its being in society and for society, the aim was not “to theorize but to build, for only through construction can a Utopia of the present be realized” (Smithson 3).

In order to build this new vision of architecture, Team 10 had to succeed where modernism failed by interrogating how building is always already an interpretation of dwelling, its modes and paradigms, and what building really meant in a rapidly changing world. Post-war society required new urban expressions of social life that reflected the desire for a radical innovation of the stale and potentially asphyxiating doctrine of the “good life,” whose exclusionary elements did not prevent the atrocities of the Holocaust and WWII. An investigation into the essence of

architecture would provide a foundation from which to build a world irrevocably changed by the barbarity of WWII, allowing architects to strip themselves of the dangerous ideologies that informed modernism and the rise of fascism. Spanish architect J.A. Coderch declared that to bring about this vision of architecture,

“I believe that we must first rid ourselves of many ideas which appear clear but are false, of many hollow words, and work with that good will that is translated into one’s own work and teaching rather than with a mere concentration on doctrinairism” (Smithson 37).

Architects had to dismantle the constraints of doctrine, tradition, and preconceived notions of what ‘architecture’ is in order to uncover a truth in architectural craft. Dutch architect JB Bakema echoed this sentiment when he asserted that “young architects must be critical about the social forces of the post-war period in order to find a real base for the structures for housing ‘the great number’” (Smithson 35). For the members of Team 10, the starting point of architecture was interrogation, as the architect had to problematize the relation between the self and society in order to build. The true being of architecture could only be realized when the architect stripped away the ideologies that informed the modern movement and the postwar period more broadly.

The essence of the being of architecture, for Team 10, was rooted in society. The architect was not a being-in-itself, isolated in their craft and building for the sake of building, but rather a being-in-the-world who, in this sense, always already dwells in built spaces that govern her existing among others and for others. The architect must thus be the conduit for the fundamental sociality of being, because “we are never, me and the other, alone in the world” (Levinas 110). For Bakema, recognizing the self as a being-in-the-world, which is constructed, organized, and thus imbued with architectural form and function, served as the foundation for rethinking architecture, as “our relation with total life has to be acknowledged as the basic element in the evolution of our social pattern, and the architect has to abandon his artificial isolation” (Smithson 35).

Team 10's ideas of a true and ethical architecture are coherent with Levinas's critique of ontology, which requires that the human subject be conceived not as a primitive unattached being, but rather as a dependent agent whose self-understanding is hostage to the inexhaustible demand that others exercise on it. In "The Aim of Team 10," the collective declared that they would plan communities "where each building is a live thing and a natural extension of others. Together they will make the places where a man can realize what he wishes to be" (Smithson 3). For the architect to tap into the truest form of architecture, she had to reimagine architecture as an organic extension of society, an expression of the unity and sociality of mankind, a form of being that is fundamentally entrenched in humanity. Team 10 approached architecture as a way to realize our being-in-the-world, as they sought to erect spaces where man could actualize his true place in the world among others.

But what does this being-among-others really entail? As a philosopher, Levinas pushed some of the intuitions at the core of Team 10 even further. Being-in-the-world, for him, is not merely living holistically in human society. Because we are always already in the world and among others, the Other has a constitutive role with respect to how we understand ourselves as human. Thus for Levinas, the "Other" is not merely someone who bears different attributes, but rather the Other is the only way in which I am capable of recognizing my own uniqueness as a human agent. If I, as a human self, were not able to respond to the precious and irreplaceable singularity of the Other, I wouldn't perceive myself as I do. As Levinas posits, "the Other is other because of me: unique and in some manner different than the individual belonging to the genus" (106). Being human, in this perspective, doesn't mean having the ability to legislate for oneself, autonomously from everybody else, but rather to feel the call of the Other, responding to the threat that always exposes them to the risk of disappearing.

This fragility, which defines the Other's ethical essence, is the truly universal characteristic, which does not pertain to the people I recognize and love, but instead extends to all others. In this sense, for Levinas it is paramount that the Other be the stranger that I cannot recognize among my neighbors or friends,

can't fully identify as belonging to a familiar classification (ie, nurse, mother, American)—a faceless face that I cannot imagine or place. I exist only in the face of the absolute alterity of the Other, as my relation to the Other “is the originary place of identification” (110). My own identity is thus at stake in the survival of the Other, his death is my death, his vulnerability calls out to me for my protection, mercy, and love. My very being is *for* the Other. As Levinas posits, “someone concerns me; the Other concerns me,” and through this concern, “there is a passage to the human,” as we recognize the vulnerability of the Other in the “defenselessness and nudity of his face” (108). Responsibility to the naked and vulnerable Other is what makes us truly human, and through our concern for the Other we discover goodness.

Levinas's call to the Other elucidates the ideas and principles of Team 10. Team 10 declared that in order to achieve a “Utopia of the present,” the architect must build *for-the-other*, as architecture is founded upon a prior moral obligation to society. As the group declared in their mission statement: “to build has a special meaning in that the architect's responsibility towards the individual or groups he builds for, and towards the cohesion and convenience of the collective structure to which they belong, is taken as being an absolute responsibility” (Smithson 3). The architect, as a being-in-the-world, must recognize that “responsibility is the first language” of both the self and the architectural trade (Levinas 108). For Team 10, the architect had to face his being as one that was fundamentally *for* others—a being that has an absolute imperative to respond to and build for the call of the Other. The architect must build in order to house the multitudes, to construct the places where the masses work and eat and dwell, to render the urban landscape hospitable, to create spaces that allow man and society to realize itself in its mutual interdependence. The architect had to recognize a fundamental alliance between the self and the Other and, as Coderch states, the architect thus needed to work with “dedication, craftsmanship, good will... and above all, love, which is acceptance and giving, not possession and domination—all these must be taken hold of and clung to, for these are the true values” of being, and thus, of architecture (Smithson 37). We bear responsibility for the Other,

we care for the Other, and ultimately, the goodness of humanity lies in loving the Other, reaching out to the Other, building for the Other.

Although Team 10 had a consistently communitarian orientation, they did not simply build for the immediate client, neighborhood, or social group. While they did build to connect neighbors and communities, there was a prior sense of obligation, a more essential call to build for a more fundamental individual that they felt responsible for. As Bakema recalled,

“An old and famous American architect said to another who was much younger and was asking for his advice: ‘Open your eyes wide and look; it is much easier than you think... Behind every building that you see there is a man that you don’t see.’ A man, he said. He did not mention whether he was an architect or not” (Smithson 35).

This human, I want to suggest, is Levinas’s Other: an individual we cannot identify, whose face we cannot fully grasp. This Other is who the architect builds for—the faceless dweller of the office or apartment building, the man who is “emptied of all ‘social role,’ and who, thus, in his nudity—his destitution, his morality,” fundamentally imposes himself as a responsibility on the architect (Levinas 115). The stranger’s imposition serves as an immediate call for love and charity, and it with this fundamental “acceptance of the anonymous” that the Team 10 architects had to build (Smithson 46). The architects of Team 10 built for the stranger, that anonymous Other, thus bearing a responsibility that “is transcendence from one to the other... from the unique to the unique, before all community: love of the stranger, hence holier, higher than any fraternity” (Levinas 108). Team 10 extended the kind of ontological charity to the anonymous that, for Levinas, would serve as the only possibility for goodness.

For Team 10, architecture’s ultimate function was to reveal the ethical truth of being. Van Eyck stated that “although architecture answers very tangible functions, ultimately its object... is to express through men and for men (through ‘us’ and for us) the real essence of existence” (Smithson 33). Team 10’s mission ultimately served as an expression of a Levinasian ethical

ontology, as being is articulated and realized through building as in-the-world and for-the-Other. Team 10 built out of care for the community, for the anonymous multitudes, and for the Other, and sought to erect interconnected cities that facilitated that love and hospitality toward the Other. This urban vision recalls Levinas's own Utopian dream that he expresses in architectural terms:

“I call love *peace*... peace is sociality, it is to attend to the other. It means not to close one's shutters, not to close one's door, but to put a *mezuzah*, a sign of welcome, on the doorpost. In a society placed under the sign of *shalom*, man always cedes his place to the Other” (113).

For both Team 10 and Levinas, Utopia is a society of open doors, of sociality and peace, circulation and connection. Both Levinas and Van Eyck discuss the role of the closed door as a signifier for isolation, as Van Eyck inquires, “what is a door? A flat surface with hinges and a lock constituting a hard terrifying border line? When you pass through a door like that are you not divided?” (Smithson 95). Team 10 sought to obliterate the solitude of the closed door, open man up to his true social essence, and ultimately achieve a society of *shalom*. As Bakema asserted, society can only find this peace, this “belonging-together, by means of the way we express in housing how to live together” (Smithson 39). Team 10 and Levinas therefore envisioned parallel Utopias, with Team 10 ultimately providing an urban expression of the imperative love for the Other.

As Team 10 and Levinas both emerged from a society recovering from an unprecedented destruction, it is no coincidence that they called for similar visions of Utopia, a new and imperative system of ethics, and a world characterized only by a peaceful sociality. The isolated conceptions of “being” that disavow the Other perpetuated the technocratic doctrines of modernism, and proved incapable of containing the autocratic regimes behind the devastation of WW II. Levinas and Team 10 thus endorsed the need to give ethics comes priority over ontology, which meant that a sense of responsibility toward the Other is the core of our understanding of human existence. Team 10's “Utopia of the present” may be the society Levinas envisioned under the sign of

shalom: a polis in which the ideal of the good life is a construction in which doors are perennially open—a new architectural expression of being that recognized the naked vulnerability of the Other, bore responsibility for him, and fundamentally cared for him.

Bibliography

- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature, and Religion*. Ed. Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Risselada, Max. "TEAM 10." *TEAM 10*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.team10online.org/team10/introduction.html>>.
- Smithson, Alison Margaret. *Team 10 Primer*. Cambridge: MIT, 1968. Print.

**NON-PRESENT NON-ACTION:
THE GOOD LIFE IN THE *ZHUANGZI***

Michael Norton
Vassar College, Class of 2014
Asian Studies

Abstract

This paper addresses the treatment of the good life in the *Zhuangzi* (ca. 350-300 BCE), one of the central texts of the Daoist school of thought. After a brief introduction to previous work on the Zhuangzian good life, the essay proceeds into a discussion of the opening lines of the text, wherein the “Kun fish and Peng bird” metaphor is introduced. Reading this image as a metaphorical representation of the unfettered mind, the paper explores the modes by which one is to access a state of joyful wandering, namely through processes of “non-action” and “non-presence.”

NON-PRESENT NON-ACTION: THE GOOD LIFE IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

Michael Norton
Vassar College, Class of 2014

Believed to have been written between about 350 and 330 B.C.E., the *Zhuangzi* is one of the foundational texts of the Daoist philosophical and religious traditions. Named after its putative author, the text has been the subject of more than sixty major East Asian commentaries since the third century, in addition to an enormous body of contemporary scholarship. Historically, the *Zhuangzi* and other Daoist texts – namely the *Daodejing* – served as a counterpoint to the dominant implementation of Confucian doctrine in political and social discourse. While the latter argued for rigid adherence to hierarchical social stratification to develop a harmonious society, the former came to represent an escape from social collectivism to discover individual paths to freedom. Translator Burton Watson holds that while most ancient Chinese philosophies were addressed to the politically privileged, the *Zhuangzi* is an appeal to the spiritual elite. Ideologically, the text encourages its readers to reconsider the epistemological foundations for human judgment; all human ills are “the product of man’s purposeful and value-ridden actions.”¹ The ultimate hope of the text for its readers is that one might train the mind so as to remove intent and bias from action, subsequently accessing a space of freedom. To wander and live in this liberated state, called *you* 遊 in Chinese, is the paradigmatic crux of the *Zhuangzi*. Existence and movement in *you* is to live the good life, but *you* as an idealized mode of life can only be accessed through the initiation of *wuwei* 無為, a state of mind wherein the practitioner removes biased intentionality from action. Further complicating the relationship between *you* and *wuwei* is the concept of the *Dao* 道 or the Way. In Daoist thought, the *Dao* is understood to be a natural order that underlies the substance and activity of the universe. The *Zhuangzi* communicates to its readers the nature of this cosmic organization

¹ Watson, Burton. *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964. p. 4.

through allegory and narrative, expressing the *Dao* primarily through metaphor. The subsequent discussion will analyze several of these key allegorical tales from the first three chapters of the *Zhuangzi* to explore the good life of *you* as accessed through *wuwei* in relation to the Way.

Western scholars have developed several frameworks through which the *Zhuangzi* articulates the good life. In an article that addresses emotion and agency within the text, Chris Fraser describes what he refers to as the “Virtuoso View.” Fraser writes that so-called “Virtuosos,” or persons of *de* 德, a term meaning “virtue, virtuosity; power,” are accepting of the inevitable without responding with emotions. This is achieved by developing an inner state of serenity and clarity; strong emotions – be they positive or negative – are removed from the mind of a Virtuoso.² To Fraser, this view of *de* is typified by the adaptive and responsive execution of higher order skills. Representations of these abilities – one instance being the fable of Cook Ding the Butcher, explored below – are model forms of the Zhuangzian good life, one of *de* and wandering (*you*).³ Paul Kjellberg believes the text means to represent the good life as an existence of skepticism. He writes, “Skepticism performs for him (Zhuangzi) not just the psychological function of releasing us from worry but also the pragmatic one of guiding us along the right path.”⁴ Within the *Zhuangzi* there are several passages that give the reader pause as he reconsiders the validity of what he had understood as truth. Of particular note is the following, taken from *Qiwulun* 齐物论, the second chapter of the text:

Nie Que asked Wang Ni, “Do you know what
all things agree in calling right?”
“How would I know that?” said Wang Ni.
“Do you know that you don’t know it?”

2 Fraser, Chris. “Zhuangzi, Emotions, and the Good Life.” Warpweftandway.com. <http://warpweftandway.com/2011/04/23/zhuangzi-emotions-and-the-good-life/> (accessed on March 20, 2014)

3 Fraser, Chris. “Emotion and Agency in *Zhuangzi*.” *Asian Philosophy* 21.1 (2011): 97–121. p. 107

4 Kjellberg, Paul. “Skepticism, Truth, and the Good Life: A Comparison of Zhuangzi and Sextus Empiricus” *Philosophy East and West* 44.1 (1994): 111–133. p. 126.

“How would I know that?”

“Then do things know nothing?”

“How would I know that? However, suppose I try saying something. What way do I have of knowing that if I say I know something I don’t really not know it? Or what way do I have of knowing that if I say I don’t know something I don’t really in fact know it? Now let me ask *you* some questions. If a man sleeps in a damp place, his back aches and he ends up half paralyzed, but is this true of a loach? If he lives in a tree, he is terrified and shakes with fright, but is this true of a monkey? Of these three creatures, then, which one knows the proper place to live? Men eat the flesh of grass-fed and grain-fed animals, deer eat grass, centipedes find snakes tasty, and hawks and falcons relish mice. Of these four, which knows how food ought to taste? Monkeys pair with monkeys, deer go out with deer, and fish play around with fish. Men claim that Maoqiang and Lady Li were beautiful, but if fish saw them they would dive to the bottom of the stream, if birds saw them they would fly away, and if deer saw them they would break in a run. Of these four, which knows how to fix the standard of beauty in the world? The way I see it, the rules of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of right and wrong are all hopelessly snarled and jumbled. How could I know anything about such discriminations?”⁵

Wang Ni asserts that even the assumption of his knowing something cannot truly be known to be true. As the dialectic between Wang Ni and Nie Que means to show, notions of the truth are highly subjective in nature: nothing can be objectively known. From this, Kjellberg argues that the *Zhuangzi* challenges the reader to suspend judgment over things about which he cannot be sure, to

⁵ Watson, p. 41. I have chosen to edit the phonetic system of transliteration originally employed by Watson to the more commonly recognized *pinyin* system for ease of accessibility to the contemporary reader.

question the veracity of that which is perceived by the senses. If one can accept this skepticism, then any internal moral struggles that had once plagued the individual will inherently be assuaged, as notions of right and wrong and of good and bad will no longer be held to be true by one's skepticism of ever having known anything at all.⁶ It is this state of skeptical ignorance that Kjellberg argues provides access to the good life. Here, however, the discussion of the idealized existence will begin, similar to Fraser above, with an exploration of the term *you*.

The first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, *Xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊 begins in dramatic fashion, with the author employing an evocative visual metaphor to shock the reader so that he might break free from the constraints of the world. The chapter begins:

In the northern darkness there is a fish and his name is Kun. The Kun is so huge I do not know how many thousand *li*⁷ he measures. He changes and becomes a bird whose name is Peng. The back of the Peng measures I don't know how many thousand *li* across and, when he rises up and flies off, his wings are like clouds all over the sky. When the sea begins to move, this bird sets off for the southern darkness, which is like the Lake of Heaven.⁸

Upon first considering the passage, the reader is struck by a sense of what Bryan Van Norden refers to as “a combination of awe and disorientation.”⁹ The text resolves two disparate forms of nearly incomprehensible size through a supernatural process of transformation, thereby marking a transition from the static realms of human understanding into the liberated mindscape of a perfected intelligence. The text does not ask the reader to logically resolve the question of the existence of Kun and Peng, as their

⁶ Kjellberg, p. 124-127

⁷ *Li* 里 refers to a traditional Chinese unit of distance, the value of which has varied considerably over time. At the time of the *Zhuangzi*'s creation it would have been roughly 400 meters, or roughly 1300 feet.

⁸ Watson, p. 23.

⁹ Van Norden, Bryan W. “Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.” *Philosophy East and West* 46.2 (1996): 247-268. p. 252

existence is well established within the realm of impossibility. The inaccessibility of setting and unknowability of the creatures' enormity challenge the reader to move in accordance with the metaphor rather than resist the mental encounter with the mythologized beings. As the Peng ascends into the heavens, it symbolically represents the ascension of the mind beyond the limitations of beings with smaller intellect;¹⁰ it soars above the mundane concerns of the earth below. In wandering – something achieved by acceptance of the inherent impossibility – as in the flight of the bird, the reader himself becomes privy to the state of *you* epitomized by the soaring of the Peng. In an essay dealing exclusively with this passage, Lian Xinda concludes that as “an inspiring example of soaring up and going beyond, the image is used to broaden the outlook of the small mind; its function is thus more therapeutic than instructional.”¹¹ Thus, an individual interpreter is not meant to parse out an ascetic meditation technique nor derive some bit of arcane mysticism from the passage, but most fundamentally, “go with the flow” and unquestioningly experience transcendent movement.

To better understand how to more formally access the state of wandering above, one must consider notions of skillfulness. Episodic representations of perfected abilities, similar to those described by Fraser above, represent seemingly perfected minds that exist in a liberated state of *you*. To understand the processes by which these skills are manifested, a passage from *Yangshengzhu* 養生主, the third chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, can be considered. The story features Cook Ding, a paragon of skillfulness. The text reads:

Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee – zip! zoom! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm...

“Ah, this is marvelous!” said Lord Wenhui.

¹⁰ The subsequent paragraphs describe smaller birds and bugs questioning the flight of the Peng, a series of images often read as a symbolic representation of lesser minds (Allinson, 1989; Lundberg, 1998).

¹¹ Lian Xian. “Zhuangzi the Poet: Re-Reading the Peng Bird Image,” *Dao* 8 (2009): 233-254. p. 235

“Imagine skill reaching such heights!”

Cook Ding laid down his knife and replied, “What I care about is the way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now – now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants...”

“Excellent!” said Lord Wenhui. “I have heard the words of Cook Ding and learned how to care for life.”¹²

Cook Ding, a butcher by trade, is so effective at dismembering a cow that he has not changed his knife in nearly two decades, a feat impossible for others of the same profession. His mastery of the trade comes from his encountering the flesh and bone with his mind, rather than working against it with his senses. In an essay delineating skillful knowing from theoretical knowing, Robert Eno writes that Cook Ding’s high skill level – one that allows him to access a state in which experience is no longer mediated by sense organs – is a result of his interactions with *shen yu* 神遇 or “spirit-like interactions” mediated through “spirit-like impulses,” or *shen yu* 神欲.¹³ This practical knowledge gained from experience, although supported by a theoretical base, represents for Eno the epitome of the perfected mind.¹⁴ Cook Ding has mastered his trade so fully that the ability is like a second nature to him, an uninterrupted extension of his mind as he encounters the external world. Professor Lee H. Yearley understands this skillfulness of characters in the *Zhuangzi* as a byproduct of a tripartite self, one in which an individual is motivated by a series of fundamental drives.

¹² Watson, pp. 46-47

¹³ The phrases *shen yu* 神遇 and *shen yu* 神欲 are transcribed identically, as the first character in each is the same while the second in each uses the same sound. In the former, *yu* 遇 means “to encounter, to interact.” In the latter, *yu* 欲 means “want, desire.”

¹⁴ Eno, Robert. “Cook Ding’s Dao and the Limits of Philosophy.” *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*. Ed. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. 127-151. p. 135

The term “drive” refers to the motivation for an action performed by an individual. The quality of that motivation, however, is itself dependent on its origin. More fundamental needs – i.e. hunger or thirst – originate from a base part of consciousness, while higher order actions and thoughts originate from a more developed, cultivated mind. These drives exist such that the lower-level drives – explained below – must be satisfied before higher-order actions can be motivated by more complex drives. Yearly describes three distinct drives: dispositional drives, reflective drives, and transcendent drives. Dispositional drives are visceral movements to action that are initiated by specific occurrences, while reflective drives are a desire to have drives other than dispositional ones and are a byproduct of conscious desire. Lastly, transcendent drives exceed the normal ability of the self and appear to originate from beyond it.¹⁵ In acting through transcendent drives, the ego is suppressed for the heightened and skillful execution of skills. In acting through these “transcendent drives,” Cook Ding has moved past notions of fundamental desire for and intentional execution of an action. Yearly and Eno’s conceptions of self-less skills converge, as both transcendent drives and “spirit-like impulses” are two modern attempts to understand the notion of *wuwei* within Western philosophical discourse.

Wuwei 無為, a phrase frequently translated as “non-action,” suggests a state in which, through reunion with the *Dao* 道 defined above as the natural order that underlies reality, one exists in perfect harmony with the present, acting without deliberate intention. The word *Dao* need not always refer to an explicit Way, but rather it can suggest any number of natural ordered processes. Deviation from these myriad *daos* represents a chaotic disruption to an overarching natural system, as it is the agglomeration of these lesser *daos* that form the universal *Dao*. In the *Zhuangzi*, to move and wander (*you* 遊) in accordance with a series of natural processes and encounters – the *Dao* described above – is to act in a state of *wuwei*. Translations of the term *wuwei* can be problematic

¹⁵ Yearley, Lee H. “Zhuangzi’s Understanding of Skillfulness and the Ultimate Spiritual State.” *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*. Ed. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. 152-183. p. 153-155

in that they may suggest to the reader that the *Zhuangzi* is recommending an existence in stasis. However, *wuwei* refers to a high-performance state by which one acts without mediating bias. In his discussion of *wuwei* spirituality, Nathaniel Barrett describes the state as “an effortless way of comporting oneself in the world with supreme harmony or efficacy.”¹⁶ Ostensibly, one acts while in a performative trance, similar to the modern, colloquial phrase “in the zone.” The story of the butcher above describes a violent, often messy task being executed with a grace and ease rarely attributed to the profession. Cook Ding’s ability requires an intensity of absorption and focus that is incongruous with self-conscious and purposeful acts; the carving of the ox necessitates a loss of the ego in the performance of the work itself. Thus, the experience is understood as a reunion between the actor and the external world, a state characterized by heightened awareness and harmony. This reunion, however, necessitates a dismissal of the ego and its pre-learned knowledge, a state explored in perhaps the most famous episode of the *Zhuangzi*: Zhuang Zhou’s¹⁷ Butterfly Dream.

Appearing in the second chapter of the text, *Qiwulun* 齐物论, Zhuangzi describes his dream as follows:

Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn’t know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn’t know if he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly there must be *some* distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.

The passage has been historically understood as a reflection on the mutability of form; all distinctions originate from a mind that cannot see clearly the interconnectedness of the Ten Thousand

16 Barrett, Nathaniel F. “Wuwei and Flow: Comparative Reflections on Spirituality, Transcendence, and Skill in the *Zhuangzi*.” *Philosophy East and West* 61.4 (2011): 679-706. p. 681

17 Zhuang Zhou was a name by which the historical Zhuangzi was known, a fact relevant to the subsequent discussion.

Things.¹⁸ Of note here is that the author of the text has removed himself from identification with the character of Zhuang Zhou. Thus, the self has been sacrificed by virtue of the omission of the pronoun “I;” the narrator has become non-present while still articulating the narrative above.¹⁹ This is further substantiated by the temporal contextualization of the parable. By relating the narrative from the temporal standpoint of having *once* happened and disassociating himself from his own historical identity of Zhuang Zhou, the author of the *Zhuangzi* has subsequently placed himself within the context of a non-present wanderer. Hans-Georg Möller has written on what he refers to as the “structure of presence” in Daoist philosophy, using earlier commentaries on the Butterfly Dream to argue that the sage ultimately occupies this place of non-presence.²⁰ He writes, “The Daoist structure of presence, as illustrated in the ‘Dream of the Butterfly,’ consists of a steady and well-ordered process, a process that is constituted by the continuous change of distinct present segments kept in balance by a non-present center.”²¹ It is the liberated mind that exists in the “non-present center.” When read this way, the dream sequence of the *Qiwulun* can be understood as two present agents – Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly – being articulated by a non-present narrator – Zhuangzi. Admittedly, this narrative does not relate explicitly to *you*; however, its implicit association with the egoless state of *wuwei* speaks to the modality by which one is to access a state of joyful wandering. To exist in a mental state of non-presence is perhaps the most integral element in achieving the high-performance state of uninterrupted skillful behavior, wherein the actor is so wholly engrossed in his work that he seamlessly encounters the other stable processes that exist within his *dao*. To be non-present is to subvert the conscious desire of the ego to delineate between forms. In so doing, *wuwei* as a mental state can

18 Known as *wan wu* 萬物 in Literary Chinese, “the Ten Thousand Things” is a common phrase in literature and philosophy that is meant to suggest all reality.

19 This concept of non-presence is explored below, drawing on an article by Hans-Georg Möller cited below.

20 Möller, Hans-Georg. “Zhuangzi’s ‘Dream of the Butterfly’: A Daoist Interpretation.” *Philosophy East and West* 49.4 (1999): 439-450. pp. 443-446.

21 *Ibid*, p. 445.

be accessed.

The *Zhuangzi* introduces the good life to its readers in the first few pages of the text: the Peng bird soars to new heights, free to exist beyond the constrictions of the mundane. This metaphorical mindscape is to be accessed by entering a state of “non-action,” wherein the self is non-present, freeing the mind to wander in unfettered bliss. To enter this state is to live a Zhuangzian good life.

Bibliography

- Barrett, Nathaniel F. "Wuwei and Flow: Comparative Reflections on Spirituality, Transcendence, and Skill in the *Zhuangzi*." *Philosophy East and West* 61.4 (2011): 679-706. Print.
- Eno, Robert. "Cook Ding's Dao and the Limits of Philosophy." *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*. Ed. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. 127-151. Print.
- Fraser, Chris. "Emotion and Agency in *Zhuangzi*." *Asian Philosophy* 21.1 (2011): 97-121.
- Fraser, Chris. "Zhuangzi, Emotions, and the Good Life." *Warpweftandway.com*. <http://warpweftandway.com/2011/04/23/zhuangzi-emotions-and-the-good-life/> (accessed on March 20, 2014)
- Kjellberg, Paul. "Skepticism, Truth, and the Good Life: A Comparison of Zhuangzi and Sextus Empiricus" *Philosophy East and West* 44.1 (1994): 111-133. Print.
- Möller, Hans-Georg. "Zhuangzi's 'Dream of the Butterfly': A Daoist Interpretation." *Philosophy East and West* 49.4 (1999): 439-450. Print.
- Van Norden, Bryan W. "Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*." *Philosophy East and West* 46.2 (1996): 247-268. Print.
- Watson, Burton. *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.
- Xinda, Lian. "Zhuangzi the Poet: Re-Reading the Peng Bird Image," *Dao* 8 (2009): 233-254.
- Yearley, Lee H. "Zhuangzi's Understanding of Skillfulness and the Ultimate Spiritual State." *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*. Ed. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. 152-183. Print.

**IN THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS:
A REVIEW OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND
RESEARCH ON HAPPINESS**

Andrew Joung
Vassar College, Class of 2016
Economics, Minor in Mathematics

Abstract

As Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) pointed out, over the course of a few decades various surveys have consistently shown that most people frequently think of happiness and how to pursue it. Despite the importance we give happiness, the term itself is unclear, leaving its pursuit to the individual and not to policy. I explore in this paper self-reported levels of happiness (Subjective Well-Being), the “architecture of sustainable happiness,” the origins of our happiness, the notion of negative feedback for people with low levels of happiness, and interventions to improve happiness. Hopefully, with happiness and a roadmap to pursuing it more clearly defined, this important quest will finally be taken seriously by policy makers.

Keywords: Subjective Well-Being (SWB); happiness; Self-Determination Theory (SDT); positive psychology; intervention

IN THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS: A REVIEW OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND RESEARCH ON HAPPINESS

Andrew Joung
Vassar College, Class of 2016

As Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) pointed out, over the course of a few decades various surveys have consistently shown that most people frequently think of happiness and the pursuit of happiness. Despite the importance we give to happiness, we often leave its pursuit to the individual and not to policy. This may have largely to do with the ephemeral nature of happiness. As Seligman et al (2005) pointed out “‘Happiness’ is too worn and too weary a term to be of much scientific use” (p. 296). Unable to rigorously and satisfactorily define happiness for ourselves, we feel that we cannot possibly tell others how to be happy. Regardless, if we can find some commonality between our various conceptions of happiness, then we can develop therapies that can improve happiness for a wide spectrum of people. The cumulative benefits of this, even if the benefits are slight, could be tremendous for a nation as a whole. Thus, it is the aim of this paper to review the cognitive and psychological literature on how happiness is understood, and to offer some potential guidelines for policy implementation.

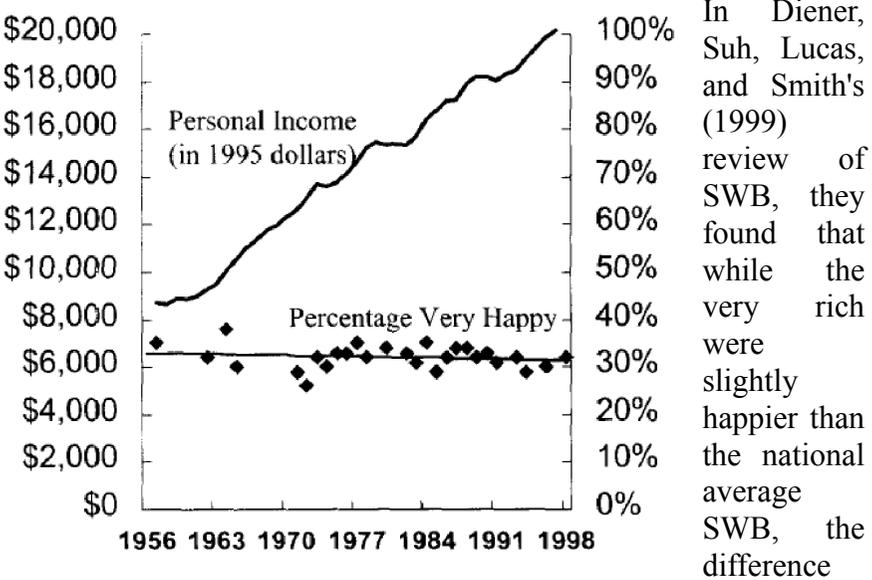
The field of psychology which is concerned with the definition and pursuit of happiness is positive psychology. Positive psychologists argue that while pathology—the study of illness and disorders—is important, psychologists should not be satisfied with achieving a neutral state of well-being for their patients. This neutral state is the satisfaction of the psychological prerequisites for physical (i.e. not suicidal) and social existence. It is a life where one is just getting by. Positive psychologists argue that the failure to push past this bare existence is a failure to explore more enriching avenues of life. In recognition of this insight, positive psychology is the study of how to help human beings thrive and push past a neutral state of well-being.

While thriving individuals may require more than just happiness, self-reported levels of happiness, or Subjective Well-Being (SWB), are regarded as essential components to well-being. The SWB of an individual is best understood as the answer to the question: *On a scale from 1 to 10, how happy are you?* However, this question is quite broad and certainly one could imagine being happy overall, but still being upset in certain domains such as marriage or work. As further research has shown, there are various aspects of SWB: overall satisfaction, satisfaction in important domains, and low levels of negative affect (the absence of unpleasant emotions or moods). The subjectivity of this measure may seem questionable, but as Diener (2000) argued, “This subjective definition of quality of life is democratic in that it grants to each individual the right to decide whether his or her life is worthwhile” (p. 34). After all, if a person says she feels sad, but objective measures says she feels happy, we must defer to the person. The emotions a person feels at a moment in time or the perceptions which one has overall are *inherently* subjective and therefore, it is the *subject* who is best capable of reporting her feelings and perceptions. This represents how SWB is a measure of both affective components—experience of emotions—and cognitive components—one’s perceptions and behaviors (Diener 2000).

In 1967, Wilson proposed in a review of SWB that those with the greatest SWB were happy due to fortuitous life circumstances. One of Wilson’s life circumstances was that the person be religious. This idea has been tested vigorously, but no one conclusive answer had emerged for many years. Some studies found a positive correlation between religiosity—or religiousness—and SWB, some found no correlation, and some even found a negative correlation. To find an answer, Hackney and Sanders (2003) engaged in a *meta-analysis*. A meta-analysis gathers as many studies as possible within the field being analyzed. Once all the data is compiled, and those studies with issues of credibility filtered out, the researchers seek to find common metrics which unify the various studies—this is known as the *effect size*. By observing the effect sizes, researchers can find broader trends that might unify a seemingly contradictory body of work.

Hackney and Sanders (2003), in their meta-analysis, argued that the reason for the seemingly contradictory results in past studies was that many studies defined religiosity differently. They found three broad commonly used definitions. “Institutional Religion” is the social and behavioral aspect of religion, such as attendance of church or of church-related activities. “Ideological Religion” is based on the beliefs underlying religious activities, such as how rigidly one held religious values. Finally, “Personal devotion” focused on personal, intrinsically motivated devotion, such as intensity of devotion and emotional attachment to God. After performing a meta-analysis using this new lens, Hacknye and Sanders found that the strength of the effect size nearly doubled when religiosity was defined as “personal devotion” rather than the other two (p. 48). This means that the mere act of being religious is not what is important. Granted there is no harm in being religious; Hacknye and Sanders found a slight positive relationship between religiosity and SWB overall. However, the motivations underlying religious actions are where one can find the positive impact.

Another life circumstance that Wilson (1967) argued was important to SWB was that the individual be “well-paid” (p. 194).



was not great. Furthermore, despite a significant rise in income among Americans, Americans on average were not much happier than before (Fig. 1). All in all, the effect of income on SWB was small. While Wilson was not entirely incorrect with regard to the general correlation of income and SWB, he certainly mistook the magnitude of income’s effect on SWB.

Wilson overestimated the impact of life-circumstances on SWB. Livingston (2006) argued that a review of the research indicated that life circumstances account for only 11-12% of the variability in our happiness. One reason for this is a phenomenon known as the *hedonic treadmill*. This is the tendency for variations in SWB to move back toward a *set-point*. While in the past, this set-point has been viewed as a neutral state of well-being, Diener, Lucas, and Scollon (2006) argued that the set-point is in fact slightly positive (i.e. we are naturally inclined to be amused). Nonetheless, the notion that we return to our original set-point after variations in SWB helps to explain how, despite a massive change in income over the past decades, Americans remain at a steady level of SWB: we got used to the extra money.

Another reason for the small impact that life circumstances

have on the variation in SWB is genetics. Lykken and Tellegen (1996) performed an experiment on fraternal and identical twins (i.e. genetically dissimilar and genetically similar twins) raised both together and apart. They surveyed the participants at age 20 and then again at age 30. Regardless of upbringing and despite the passage of ten years, the SWB of one identical twin strongly correlated with the other's SWB. In contrast, fraternal twins showed no correlation. Therefore, Lykken and Tellegen argued that up to 50% of an individual's variation in SWB is based on genetics. This leaves 38-39% of the variation in SWB to our behaviors. Genetics, happiness-related life circumstances, and happiness-related behaviors—this trinity of factors, according to Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005), control an individual's happiness and form the “architecture of sustainable happiness” (p. 114). While one might be discouraged by the significance of genetics in the variation of our SWB, one should be encouraged by the importance of our behaviors. Genetics is permanent, and life circumstances are generally stable; on the other hand, behaviors might be changeable through therapy, self-motivation, and maybe even policy.

Why do certain behaviors promote greater SWB? The evidence seems to point to the underlying motivations for performing these actions. As mentioned previously, with regards to religiosity, this was demonstrated by the results of Hackney and Sanders (2003). Regarding the pursuit of income, Srivastava, Locke, and Bartol (2001) surveyed business students. These surveys aimed to find out the business students' SWB, and whether a student was motivated to pursue high-paid careers in business primarily for money or for other motivations. The researchers then observed differences in SWB between subjects. They found that, in general, there was a negative relationship between the *pursuit* of money and SWB. However, they found that if motivations are taken into account, *the relationship disappears*. In fact, depending on what the motivation was for pursuing high incomes, the relationship became positive. Therefore, in this case, the behavior's impact on SWB seems to be entirely based on the motivations, not the act itself.

Overall, happiness seems dependent on the motivations for

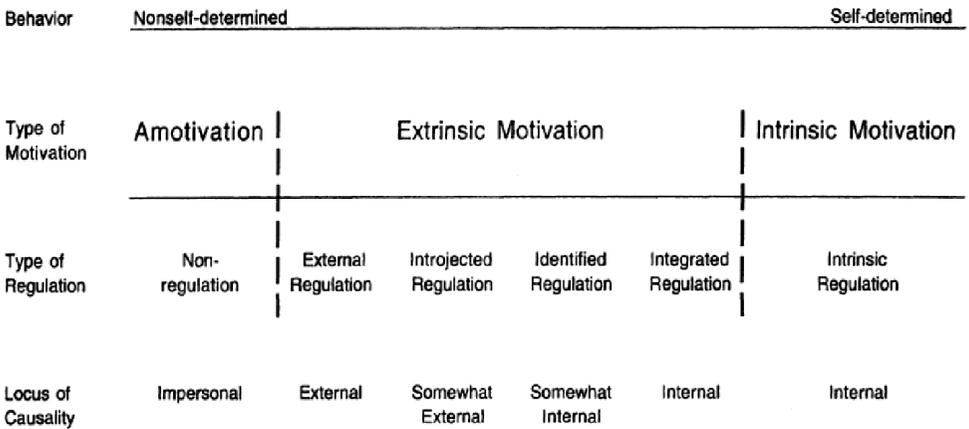
our behaviors. Why? According to Deci and Ryan (2000), human beings have three innate psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. They labeled this as Self-Determination Theory (SDT). While competence (proficiency at an activity), seems independent of the other two, one might think that autonomy and relatedness are conflicting psychological forces. Autonomy refers to self-organization of one's life. Relatedness does not mean homogeneity, but having a network of relationships.

According to Deci and Ryan (2000), an individual can only maintain her psychological growth and well-being by providing herself with all three psychological nutrients. These psychological needs are similar to the physical need of food. Without food, the physical body wastes away; similarly, without the fulfillment of these psychological needs the mind wastes. When one cannot access her needed psychological nutrients, one develops substitutes, or *compensatory motives*, which do not satiate the need but do provide some satisfaction. These substitutes distract from seeking and achieving need satisfaction. In Deci and Ryan's review of the material, they point out that children who rated their mothers as low in democracy and noncontrollingness (autonomy), and low in warmth (relatedness) grew up with significantly higher desires to pursue visible indicators of wealth. As shown in a prior mentioned study, in general, the degree to which one pursues wealth has a negative relationship with one's happiness. Therefore, ironically, while these children grow-up and seek wealth to achieve greater well-being, those who pursue visible indicators of wealth never achieve greater well-being.

An interesting trend to view through the lens of SDT is income inequality. Oishi, Kesebir, and Diener (2011) found that Americans were on average happier when national income inequality was lower than when it was higher. Using the General Social Survey, which gathered data from 1972 to 2008, Oishi, Kesebir and Diener had a sample size of 48,318 valid responses. However, the change in happiness between periods of high inequality and low inequality varied significantly by class: on average, poorer individuals had lower SWB than their richer counterparts. However, the higher SWB of the rich was not solely due to having more disposable income. During periods of greater

income inequality, the average American trusted others less and perceived others to be less fair. According to their model, these perceptions were negatively correlated with happiness, not the disparity in income. Therefore, it seems that as income inequality increases, the average American perceives others as untrustworthy. Only able to trust herself, the average American increasingly isolates herself from her community. Finally, the psychological stress from lacking relatedness manifests itself as the lower SWB that Oishi et al (2011) found.

According to SDT, our behaviors will satisfy our psychological needs only if our behaviors are intrinsically



motivated, not extrinsically motivated. A behavior is extrinsically motivated when the focus of the motivation is based on external values or objects—things which are independent of the self and the self’s values—such as money. Intrinsic motivation is based on values which are centered on the self. The importance of intrinsic motivation is obvious in the context of autonomy. If one is extrinsically motivated, one is not acting for one’s own sake, but the sake of something outside one’s values. Therefore, one is not in full control of their actions, not completely autonomous.

As Fig. 2 shows, there is a wide spectrum of motivation, and it is far more complex than simply extrinsic or intrinsic. However, integrated regulation is especially important. After all, nearly all people can admit that there is something that they once

disliked or were ambivalent to, but have come to intrinsically enjoy. That is the process of integrated regulation: internalization of once external values with one's own values such that the pursuit of these values becomes entirely volitional, giving greater autonomy.

Some research indicates that low SWB could lead to *negative feedback*, further diminishing chances at higher SWB. Diener (2000) points out that the self-evaluations people give regarding SWB are both cognitive and affective. Happy people feel and perceive *differently* than sad people. This is supported by Pe, Koval, and Kuppens (2013). In this study, a final sample of 95 participants was given two surveys. To measure the cognitive side of SWB, participants were given a survey asking them to provide an overall evaluation of their lives on a scale from 1 to 7. To measure the affective side of SWB, participants were asked how frequently they experienced ten positive and ten negative feelings; the difference between the positive and negative affect scales provided a measure of participants' affective SWB. Participants were then presented in a series of trials with words either positive or negative, and asked if the word they were presented with matched or did not match the affect of the word two trials back.

The results showed that people who had higher life satisfaction and affect balance could more effectively retain and update positive information in their working memory²². If the working memory of happier people is more likely to store positive information, it therefore follows that happier people are more likely to have long-term happy memories and that sadder people will have fewer (Pe, Koval, and Kuppens, 2013). This presents a feedback system similar to the one presented by those who lack one or more of the psychological needs outlined by SDT: those who are sad have trouble recalling happy memories and thus judge themselves to be sadder, further impeding their ability to retain happy thoughts.

Presented with this negative feedback system and the self-destructive nature of pursuing activities which lack one or more of the three psychological nutrients of SDT, one might be led to

²² Working memory is a system that temporarily stores and processes relevant information prior to it being incorporated into long-term memory.

believe that people are not completely free to pursue changes in behavior and that policy might be ineffective. Fortunately, Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) offered empirical evidence that intervention can improve self-reported levels of happiness. In this study, participants were asked to perform one of six exercises; of the six, one was a placebo, providing a control. Participants were explicitly told by Seligman et al to continue each exercise for one-week. These exercises were designed to recall positive aspects of one's life. For example, one of the best interventions—called *three good things*—asked participants to write down three things that went well each day for a week. These interventions were designed to cost minimal effort and time, so as to encourage adherence to the program. The results found increased happiness and fewer reports of depressive symptoms for *six months* for two of these expectations, and one month for one other. In addition, the study found that the duration for which new higher levels of SWB were sustained was strongly impacted by whether or not participants continued to adhere to the exercises beyond the explicit one-week limit.

Beyond just offering hope to the despaired, this study has profound policy implications. One important aspect of the exercises performed in Seligman et al. (2005) is that the most effective are relatively simple and quick. The ease of doing these exercises made sustained adherence easier, which, as mentioned previously, increased the duration of higher levels of SWB. For example, one of the most effective exercises in this study was simply writing down three things that went well each day and their causes. The simplicity of these tasks also means that they are easy to teach, opening the door for policy consideration. Cornum, Matthews, and Seligman (2011) designed the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program. According to them, this program is designed to proactively address the psychological stress that US troops face in war. As the study points out, approximately 1.64 million military personnel have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. Hopefully, the seriousness with which the military considers the psychological well-being of its troops foreshadows a broader conversation on well-being by policy makers.

It seems that positive psychologists have successfully

turned that ephemeral term “happiness” into a more concrete, scientifically-understandable form. For decades, the GDP has been the barometer for whether we as a nation were on the right track. Some of us may have heard of *green GDP*—a measure of economic growth that accounts for environmental damages. Diener (2000) advocated for a national index of happiness. Even those motivated purely by the pursuit of wealth pursue wealth due to the delusion that that pursuit will bring happiness. What is the purpose of economic growth if it does not sustain or improve the well-being of the people who live in that economy? The research makes clear that the introduction of simple mental exercises can significantly impact SWB. Teaching students these exercises seems much easier than teaching calculus or biology. Moreover, as research like Oishi et al. (2011) and Srivastava et al. (2001) shows, our SWB is significantly related to the intimacy of our relationships with our friends, family, and broader communities. Maybe it is time that we stop pursuing dollars and growth rates, and begin examining *ourselves*. Such an endeavor could be far more profitable.

Bibliography

- Cornum, R., Matthews, M. D., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Comprehensive soldier fitness: Building resilience in a challenging institutional context. *American Psychologist*, *66*(1), 4-9. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 34-43. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Diener, E., Diener, M., & Diener, C. (1995). Factors predicting the subjective well-being of nations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*(5), 851-864. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Scollon, C. N. (2006). Beyond the hedonic treadmill: Revising the adaptation theory of well-being. *American Psychologist*, *61*(4), 305-314. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, *11*(4), 227-268. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin*, *125*(2), 276-302. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Economist Intelligence Unit. (2005). *The Economist Intelligence Unit's Quality-of-Life Index*. Retrieved July 17, 2005, from http://www.economist.com/media/pdf/QUALITY_OF_LIFE.pdf
- Hackney, C. H. and Sanders, G. S. (2003), Religiosity and Mental Health: A Meta-Analysis of Recent Studies. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *42*: 43-55. doi: 10.1111/1468-5906.t01-1-00160
- Myers, D. G. (2000). The funds, friends, and faith of happy people. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 56-67. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Livingston, Ken. (2006). God, Aristotle, and the New Science of

- Happiness. *Free Inquiry*, 26, 32-38.
- Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111-131. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Oishi, S., Kesebir, S., & Diener, E. (2011). Income inequality and happiness. *Psychological Science*, 22(9), 1095-1100. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Pe, M. L., Koval, P., & Kuppens, P. (2013). Executive well-being: Updating of positive stimuli in working memory is associated with subjective well-being. *Cognition*, 126(2), 335-340. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology. an introduction. *The American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-14. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 293-311. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *The American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410-421. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Srivastava, A., Locke, E. A., & Bartol, K. M. (2001). Money and subjective well-being: It's not the money, it's the motive. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 959-971. Retrieved from www.scopus.com
- Wilson, W. R. (1967). CORRELATES OF AVOWED HAPPINESS. *Psychological Bulletin*, 67(4), 294-306. Retrieved from www.scopus.com

**PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY:
WILLIAM IRVINE'S *A GUIDE TO THE GOOD
LIFE: THE ANCIENT ART OF STOIC JOY***

Derek Butterton
Vassar College

You have just bought an expensive new car, which you drive home and park in your driveway. The next morning, when you go outside, you see that the windows have been smashed and the paint scratched. Most people will say that a bad thing has happened to you, to which your reaction ought to be justified anger.

A few people, however, will say that you should not become angry. They will point out that you have two options: you can become enraged, making yourself unhappy and doing nothing to fix your car, or you can remain calm and determine the best course of action based on your current circumstances. In fact, they will go so far as to claim that the vandalism is not a bad thing—the only bad thing would be if you allowed it to upset you. The people giving this unorthodox advice are the Stoics.

In comparison to other schools of philosophy, relatively little has been written about the Hellenistic philosophy of Stoicism. Books and articles about Stoicism generally take one of three approaches. The first approach is an historical one and its central question is what these ancient thinkers actually believed. Works of this sort focus on reconstructing the doctrines of Stoic writers, deciphering their intricate conceptual vocabulary and determining the relationship between the different parts of their philosophy. A book like *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, containing chapters on topics such as metaphysics, epistemology, and theology, exemplifies this approach.

The second approach is a comparative one, and its central question is how Stoicism relates to other philosophies. Some of the most interesting works of this sort focus on the debate between Stoic and Aristotelian ethics. While Aristotle maintains that virtue involves feeling every emotion at the proper time and in the proper amount, the Stoics maintain that virtue requires eliminating certain

emotions entirely. Works such as Martha Nussbaum's book on Hellenistic philosophy, *The Therapy of Desire*, and Peter Vernezze's insightful essay, "Moderation or the Middle Way: Two Approaches to Anger," focus on the provocative Stoic-Aristotelian dialogue, while other authors compare Stoicism to Christianity, Buddhism, or Transcendentalism.

The third approach is a practical one: how does Stoicism help us to live well? William Irvine's *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy* wholeheartedly embraces this approach. Irvine writes, "nonphilosophers—the people, as I have explained, who are the primary audience for this book—won't be concerned with preserving the purity of Stoicism. For them the question is, does it work?" (245).

From the start, it is clear that *A Guide to the Good Life* is not a work of traditional academic philosophy. Irvine aims to break down the division between philosophical and popular writing: as a result, he spends little time on the sort of technical work undertaken by writers in the historical and comparative approaches. He omits logic, physics, and theology, and crystallizes Stoic ethics into an accessible list of psychological techniques. In many ways, Irvine's approach resembles the project of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, a branch of psychology that draws on Stoic principles. Like practitioners of CBT, Irvine is primarily interested in whether Stoicism can help cure the anxiety and unhappiness of ordinary people.

This focus on practical application leads Irvine to write in language that is clear and enormously simple. He limits his use of Greek and Latin, avoids academic jargon, and liberally illustrates his points with examples. For instance, when discussing the "dichotomy of control," he uses the image of a tennis match: how I play is under my control, while how my opponent plays is out of my control. As a result of its clear and concrete language, the book is easy to read and accessible to just about anyone who picks it up. Even if readers do not agree with Irvine's views, they will at least understand what those views are.

The central thesis of Irvine's Stoicism is that the negative emotions we experience—anger, envy, fear, annoyance—result from mistaken beliefs about which things are valuable in the

world. By becoming clear on which things are in our control (opinion, choice, attitude, effort) and which are not (wealth, health, reputation, the past, death, property, other people) we realize that only the things in our control are truly valuable. This realization helps us to banish negative emotions from our lives and attain a state of tranquility—an abiding joy that makes life worth living.

The book is divided into four sections. The first section provides brief biographies of the Roman Stoics who are Irvine's primary sources—Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius—and engagingly describes how they applied philosophy in their own lives. The second section presents psychological techniques aimed at attaining tranquility. These techniques include visualizing bad events in order to better appreciate one's current state, letting go of anxiety based on past events, and even depriving oneself of certain pleasures—occasionally forgoing ice cream, for instance—in order to develop control over one's desires. The third section examines common situations in which people might need to use these techniques. The chapters on Stoicism in old age are especially insightful—for example, Irvine points out the similarity between the ancient practice of exiling political opponents to barren islands and the modern practice of exiling the elderly to nursing homes. The final section discusses various objections to the Stoic worldview and attempts to show how Stoic ethics can be stripped of its ancient teleological assumptions and reconciled with a non-theistic account of evolution.

A Guide to the Good Life attempts two projects, one practical and one methodological, and it succeeds on both counts. The practical project is to give readers a set of tools that they can use to live better lives. These techniques sound banal at first—*imagine not having the things you possess, so that you can be happy you have them*—but Irvine explains them with a clarity and inspiration that makes his proposals merit serious consideration.

The methodological project is less explicit but equally successful. Irvine wants to send a wake-up call to academic philosophy. The philosophy departments at today's universities, he argues, have made two mistakes. First, they have adopted a form of writing that is incomprehensible to just about everyone who is not a philosopher. Articles filled with technical terms and symbolic

logic will not attract non-specialists to the discipline. Second, and more importantly, most philosophers focus on problems that are irrelevant to ordinary people's lives. Puzzles in the philosophy of language and arcane debates in the history of philosophy make no difference whatsoever to whether people live in a fulfilling and worthwhile manner. Irvine believes that philosophy ought to tell us what is important in life and how we can secure it—ought to provide us with what he calls a “philosophy of life.” Indeed, he argues that despite their variety of interests, the ancient Stoics never lost sight of the fact that any worthwhile philosophy ought to help people live virtuously and free from needless suffering. His *Guide to the Good Life* is a thoughtful, readable attempt to lay out one such philosophy.

A GUIDE TO THE GOOD LIFE

The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy

William Irvine

314pp. Oxford University Press. \$19.95.

**THE WINTER IS OVER, BUT WHENCE SPRING?:
ANTONIO NEGRI'S *THE
WINTER IS OVER***

Spencer Davis
Vassar College

In the year 2014, what power does “The Good Life” have? Who believes that there is a better life at which we should aim? It is no accident that Jean-François Lyotard named the postmodern condition as incredulity to metanarrative precisely on the eve of the Thatcher-Reagan decade of triumph when newly deregulated economies on both sides of the Atlantic saw surging growth at home and Soviet weakness abroad. Writing in 1996, Antonio Negri had just witnessed the culmination of that triumph: the “end of history,” the unexpected breakup of the Soviet Union into several liberal democratic successor states, which seemed to anoint liberal democracy the best and only form of legitimate government. He also saw the rise of the French public sector’s 1995 general strike in response to then-President Jacques Chirac’s proposed welfare reforms. In *The Winter is Over*, Negri uses his unique historical moment to conjure specters of Marx in an age that had triumphantly claimed to have defeated and buried Marxism forever. The analyses he begins here, which he would later expand and deepen in his works with Michael Hardt, offer a utopian take on dark times. As the frigid winds of NSA surveillance and renewed eastern European conflict blow over the world, Negri’s diagnoses, republished with a new introduction in 2013, merit another look—the promise of something better, of a life worth living: maybe another iteration of the good life, or at least a call to reconsider what he calls the commons: what we share, do not share, and should share for or polis to be still called as such.

Rather than aim at a refreshed Communist Manifesto, Negri provides a journalistic analysis of the Marxism that already inhabits his time. This is reflected in his writing, which flows between example and analysis without imposing a divide. His approach recalls both Jacques Derrida and David Hume—the former by means of a Levinasian characterization of subjectivity,

the latter by means of a practical anthropological groundwork. For example, in the intellectual labor performed by French social workers (e.g. addiction counselors) Negri discovers a new conception of the subject—the multitude, a single agent comprised of many beings. Negri’s writing in that way resembles that of a phenomenologist more than that of a Marxist, for the task he sets himself is not system building but rather observation of our given system.

Yet, the sinuous twisting of *The Winter is Over* is also its greatest fault. The book is a collection of articles, speeches, and other publications Negri wrote in the period between 1989 and 1995, not a systematic and fluid narrative.. While we are able to see Negri’s fresh responses to various moments, we are also forced to confront them as he did.

This said, the collection is masterfully edited—Negri’s illuminating remarks regarding the first Gulf War, the aforementioned general strikes, and the opening of Disneyland Paris trace the commonality between those disparate phenomena—but one cannot and should not read *The Winter is Over* as a treatise building toward a single argument. The book is a collection of doctor’s notes regarding the early part of the nineties more than it is a cohesive diagnosis. Negri has upended Marx’s thesis, that philosophy should be enacted, not spoken. His explorations, bound to their time, are acts that strive to respond faithfully to that time rather than prescribe an ideal future for it. Negri’s anti-authoritarian stance makes for a collection whose narrative arc is difficult to track, but this fault of style is a feature of argument, for Negri believes that hope for a better world lies in the present age, not outside it.

Negri’s notes, taken together, suggest that global capital is both at its most triumphant and vulnerable in its mature form. He correctly asserts that, by means of “just-in-time” manufacturing processes, “...the users themselves are the producers of service.” No Toyota car, for example, is produced before it is demanded, and no air traffic controller directs anything other than an airplane full of people. Producers need no longer stimulate demand in consumers, as consumers are now themselves agents for capital’s reproduction. Global capital manages those agents to its own

benefit through the financial markets, where immense sums of money traded at whim stimulate demand. This seems the ultimate closing-off of revolutionary space, for agents in such a system cannot possibly exercise autonomy in the traditional, deontological sense of the word. Negri's stunning argument is that this condition of late capitalism, rather than its ultimate triumph, represents its weakness. Agents, or beings, as Negri defines agents, find a space in which they might exist separate from capital even as they are fully determined by its force.

The public sector worker, Negri thinks, makes easiest use of that space, for that sort of worker responds to the demands of other beings without the mediation of goods. Public sector workers can, to reference Marx, labor without alienation from the results of their work. The job of a transportation worker, for example, consists of facilitating the transport of others. Such a basic relation sidesteps financial markets. While the automobile industry might extract capital, in the form of a car, users of the Paris metro co-produced not transportation goods but a transportation service involving another being. Their demands for transportation were not addressed to inert steel and glass but to the face of another; another, what's more, who is not some theoretical other but Simone the ticket salesperson or Jacques the conductor. The Parisian commuter purchased tickets from, and rode in trains run by, other beings that were not attempting to make a profit. This peculiar relationship, opposed in its unprofitability to neoliberalism's privatizing drive, is what brought the public service strike to Negri's attention.

Unlike the novel public strike, the more familiar general strike was then and is now unconscionable to any citizen of a liberal democracy. When autoworkers strike, for example, the public revolts against the resultant higher cost of living and demonizes laborers. What is good for GM is good for America, even when it is not. When the public sector went on strike in France, however, they found solidarity with ordinary Parisians, who supported them by finding alternative transportation for the strike's duration. President Chirac, a scion of neoliberalism, backed down in the face of such popular opposition. Negri thinks this *metropolitan strike* is an example of a radical new conception

of the public, one that does not require state administration. The liberal democratic state in that instance was a guardian of private enterprise, and in that role it found itself opposed to the people it claimed to serve. The self-determining public that opposed Chirac, Negri argues, is the means by which beings might wrest a democratic future from states that no longer serve their well-being. *The Winter is Over*, if its prognoses are correct, discovers the new space in which a new Marxism can flourish without need for dialectic between ideology and actuality.

Well-written, journalistic in interest, and utopian in hope, *The Winter is Over* shows that Marx's prognoses—that capitalism is a self-generating and self-defeating force—are not buried under Russian soil but instead dwell in France, in Italy, and elsewhere. Since the book's publication, that elsewhere has only expanded. One can look to the Arab Spring for a notable example of democratic revolution in which something like the multitude came to fruition, but one can also look to such mundane places as the San Francisco Bay area, where in 2013 a public transport strike much like the one Negri explored in Paris arose and succeeded in achieving many of the striker's demands with the cooperation of the affected passengers. Negri in this work is no Lenin, who claimed that the good life was the Communist life. His observations, however, suggest that beings inhabiting the postmodern condition have not given up hope that the good life is still worth fighting for.

THE WINTER IS OVER

Antonio Negri

264 pp. Semiotext(e)/Foreign Agents. \$16.95.

**DECONSTRUCTING THE GOOD LIFE:
DAN KESSLER AND MARLENA SANTOS
INTERVIEW MICHAEL MURRAY**

Professor Michael Murray retired in December 2013 after forty-three years at Vassar College, where he taught courses on Phenomenology and Existentialism, Queer Theory, Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics, Literary Theory, and key figures in 20th century European philosophy including Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. He was a visiting scholar at the University of Turin, in Italy, and Yale University. During the 1980s, Professor Murray lectured at Peking University. His lectures, *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: The Great Wall of China*, were published in Chinese in 1984. That trip ignited Professor Murray's passion for contemporary Chinese art, which brought him to curate one of the earliest exhibitions of Chinese experimental art in the U.S. The catalogue, *Beijing/New York: Avant-Garde Chinese Art*, was published in 1986. Professor Murray is author of several books including *Modern Philosophy of History* and *Modern Critical Theory: A Phenomenological Introduction*, and is the editor of and contributor to *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy: Critical Essays*. Among his articles, "Time in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit," in the *Review of Metaphysics*, "Wittgenstein and Heidegger," in *The Philosophical Review*, and "Against Dialogue," in *Reinterpreting the Political: Continental Philosophy and Political Theory*;

Because of his many contributions on a wide range of topics, Professor Murray has been a leading scholar in Continental Philosophy in the United States and abroad. He is currently working on a theory of censorship in the arts, which traces its genealogy throughout the history of Western Philosophy, but also anchors it in different social and geopolitical spaces. He asks: what is the construct of censorship and which are the institutions that inform it? In examining the way in which a given concept is a social practice that grows out of a specific institutional setting, Professor Murray continues the tradition inaugurated by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and other Continental theorists. Concepts like the human being, the good life, and the citizen, taken by the

tradition to be universally applicable, turn out to be exclusive and potentially hegemonic if their normativity isn't exposed, and thus offered to critical scrutiny. The approach associated with the name of deconstruction, which Professor Murray broadly embraces, aims at expanding the borders of these concepts, and to shine light on the possibility of conceiving them otherwise. This mode of critique demands that we put pressure on those comfort areas that often times determine what is familiar to us, and in so doing, forces us to re-examine our grounds of attachment to ourselves and to others as well as to life itself.

The themes that motivate Professor Murray's work resonate with our mission to explore and critically assess the traditional construct of the good life. We originally looked to Professor Murray for his authority and expertise in areas of philosophy with unique relations to the good life. However, in line with his philosophical beliefs, Professor Murray requested that we see him not as an authority, but as a partner in intellectual inquiry. To respect Professor Murray's request, we have structured the interview as an exchange of perspectives on a number of topics, rather than as a series of questions.

In the context of an interview, the reader might expect a philosophy professor to provide a definitive answer. By contrast, Professor Murray's responses are unavoidably open, demanding both the original questioners and his readers to reflect on their own on what has been said. This is the spirit of deconstruction that, as Derrida claims, "tonight I will act for awhile as if these two orders were distinct, to seek to determine later on, here or elsewhere, at least as a disputable hypothesis, the rule of what passes [*ce qui passe*] from one to the other, the rule of what occurs [*ce qui se passe*] between the two, and for which I would have, in some, to respond."²³

DK & MS: What is the good life?

MM: This topic runs throughout the history of philosophy—Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Hume and Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche, and their contemporary variants. Sometimes in

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Abraham, the Other*, 5.

connection with religion but also independent of religion. Some differences among them are enormous, others smaller, while some consist in matters of emphasis or priority. Throughout the question of the good life always gets thought in terms of an essence, an ideal, and a telos, along with some grounding ground (nature, god, law). It's impossible even to describe all these chapters of the tradition here, let alone evaluate them. But I could hazard that there has been a weakening of the force of the traditional constructs (essences, grounds). I don't just mean that, if you look up the most common definition of the good life in everyday English today, you will find that it means luxury living, being rich and enjoying high levels of material comfort. Rather the weakening calls into question or deconstructs the essences and the foundational claims and seeks an alternate way to think.

Is 'weakening of thought' a tendency, or are you referring to a particular definition of Heidegger as revisionary, or without a structured moral theory?

Weakening (Vattimo) or deconstructing (Heidegger, Derrida) is not weakening of thought but the thought that weakens, weakens the referred to structures, but it also describes what's actually been happening in cultural history. It pertains not only to moral theory but jointly to ontology and theology, which form an ensemble.

For example, Heidegger—the most challenging, revisionary philosopher of the last century—sought to think the authenticity of human Dasein in a way that avoids the split between descriptive and prescriptive, and to think the meaning of Being prior to or beyond the split up between reality and appearance, between being and becoming, and between being (is) and value (ought), which became the staples of both ancient and modern thought.

Heidegger seems to take issue with Platonic dialectic of forms, more broadly with Western metaphysics, and the other descriptive/prescriptive theories you have mentioned. What modes of thought has he instead employed in searching for the authenticity of human Being?

Instead, he has sought what he calls the existential-ontological analytic of Dasein, or existence as the specifically human mode of Being, and set out its complex of structures (being in the world, being with others, being oneself) and care, concern and solicitude, whose meaning rest upon the temporalization of existence and its historicity. The ordinary condition of existence is what he calls Average Everydayness—similar motifs can be found in Kierkegaard and J. S. Mill—which means acting and thinking in the mode of the One-self (doing what one does, thinking what one thinks, speaking as one speaks). This mode of selfhood is inauthentic, the mode in which I am not myself but someone else (the generic Oneself), divested of responsibility, in flight from the demands of authentic life, while caught in a constant underlying anxiety. Authenticity consists in responding to the call to be one's own self, i.e., to modify my life, my relation to myself and to others, and to come face to face with my mortality.

Is the normativity of the good life influenced by historical, cultural, or social factors?

Historicity, culture, and society are all involved of course, but this way of putting the question already assumes affirmative agreement and regards the manner of posing as neutral. Yet the very taken for grantedness of the question and the entire conceptual framework—Norm, normativity, normality, normalization—has all been called into question and problematized by thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, and Butler.

By posing that question, we reaffirmed the notion of the good life as normative or collective. This is one example of self-normalization – transforming the singular, the individual into a normed universal. What do you think about the concept of self-normalization?

I think self-normalization belongs to normalization. I'd put it slightly differently from your formulation: the singular is transformed into an individual, which instantiates or gets

subsumed into the normal universal, which Reiner Schürman calls the subsumption machine.

Conversations about identity are very prevalent at Vassar. Is identification with a race, religion, or organization a form of self-normalization? Is identification different from acknowledging one's context in space, time, or background?

The various senses and the scenes of identity issues would need to be unpacked. Race, religion, to which should be added sexual-orientation, and political parties etc.—yes, these are various forms of self-normalization, which like the entire regime of the normal assume the look of unquestionable, reified, and antagonized enclosures and underwriters. Yet, any group action and support requires staged collective unities, whether to achieve emancipatory or oppressive purposes. In the area that I myself have made some contribution—Queer Theory—over the last decade, I saw quite distinctly how so-called gay identity marked a crucial break from the dominion of the pseudo-science of homosexuality (the dereliction of this concept is still not wholly appreciated), but this identity assertion suffered its own rupture with the advent of the Queer critique of identity, anti-essentialist, and making use of creative re-signification. Nonetheless, getting over the idea of strong or substantial identity, we support the push for gay rights in the military and in marriage equality, which has found notable successes, but does not require an ID card and is open to participation by “non members.”

Is the “good life” constrained by a specific interpretation of the human? Does it always exist within certain institutions involving certain exclusions?

This belongs with earlier questions you asked on the good life and on normativity. Conceptions of the good life do belong to and vary with conceptions of the human, and are defined within certain horizons and limits. Yet the essential historicity of human life must not be viewed as a mere epistemic fault, but as positive

possibilities of existence, of how to live which always remains to be decided.

In lieu of a more detailed response to all that might be said about the above questions, let me speak for myself, about how I would *start* to set forth an answer: First, I think of life—of a life, of a life time, and therewith of the time of life, of having the time of my life, and the time of our lives. When I think of life in this way I think of it as given, not in the sense of the merely supposed, but as a gift, though without a giver, as happening, insurgence, movement.

When someone gives me a gift, I feel indebted to them – I am uncomfortable until I return an equal or greater gift. That is, there is a measurability and economy to the gift. If life is given or gifted, without a giver, then what do we feel indebted to?

You describe the limited economy of an exchange as the model of the gift, which is quite familiar to us. But this does not really capture the true meaning of gift. In contrast to the debt, the guilt, the cycle, in the gift of life there is no debt incurred and no one to be paid, hence the only response at the same level is not repayment, but gratitude, giving thanks. Thankfulness breaks through the limited economy model. This kind of extraordinary thankfulness manifests itself in the giving of gifts with a generosity beyond any expectation of return or in gracious reception. I pass on this gift of thought summoned first by Heidegger and Derrida.

Vitality, being and feeling alive, is unmistakably good. Human life—existing in the way we do—involves our bodily movements—sexed and gendered, desiring, longing, thinking, feeling, understanding, creating and constructing, all the gestures by which we inhabit the world and cohabit with our fellow bodily mortals. In this worldly context of movements and happenings, there are special times, including when we think we are engaged in deliberate projects and following plans, when we encounter the unexpected, the accidental, the coincidental, which in my opinion constitute a much larger part of life than is commonly assumed and

may be the liveliest part of life. In the late eighties, I conducted a Faculty Center seminar, with faculty and visiting scholars that focused on these issues, titled “Accidentality.” In my view, it’s one of the great motifs of post-modern thought. Nietzsche speaks of the “ancient nobility of the accident.” For me, this stratum is the indestructible that corresponds to what Wallace Stevens calls “the passion for yes that has never been broken.” At a minimum, a life is good, the goodness of life is the good life, not first of all because a measure or standard is imposed upon it or to which it’s subject, something supposed to be higher than life.

Being alive means alive to the world: To others, with others, to one’s self and our care for them; to language both everyday and poetic, to public and political life. To the products of labor, to the processes of technology, and to the working of works of art. And to encompassing nature as the field of living beings, animals and plants, as earth, sea, weathers, and sky.

You began your response by mentioning a number of philosophers who searched for a final telos, ideal, or highest mode of human existence. Why is there a resistance in Western philosophy to “Accidentality” and “being alive to the world” in the pursuit of that which is “higher than life”?

To answer, briefly: The intelligible is usually thought in terms of as the regular and predictable, the normal, hence resistance to what does not conform, what is more vertical (‘out of the blue’) than horizontal. Further, the accidental is transitory, passing, and marginal and lacks the assurance of the enduring, everlasting. Heidegger argues that Western thought has been governed by a metaphysics of presence that valorizes ‘constant presence’ to rank beings, and conversely, devalorizes those that pass away. This metaphysics corresponds to what Nietzsche calls the fear and resentment against time. Heidegger’s philosophical move was to show that time must be more fundamental, since beneath the threshold of traditional ontology lies a un-thought temporal projection that makes meaningful constant presence, and further,

to claim that this repressed projection arises from the inauthenticity of average everydayness.

With reference to Foucault’s account of the examination, combining “an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing gaze, that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish, it establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them.”

I like your question, namely, *how do I balance (or cope with) the task (duty) of ensuring my students understand the subject with the normalizing gaze that informs any form of examination?*

First, note that the gaze is not that of the professor, but of the educational apparatus/practice, which no one sees. Think of each student’s considerable accumulated file, the collection and circulation of information within departments, committees, academic, medical, disciplinary, employment offices, etc. Think further how all this process gets reflectively internalized by the student, in self-surveillance. Beside the teaching classroom, think of the residential buildings where students live. Interestingly, Vassar’s Main Building originally followed the essential model of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon—as it passed down to Renwick, from his Nurses Training Hospital, now a ruin on Roosevelt Island, neighboring a prison and octagonal asylum, and before that from the London Charity Hospital, a series guided by Bentham’s ground plan [for prisons, asylums, hospitals, factories, schools].²⁴ In *Alma Mater*, Helen Lefkowitz shows how this model was thought to fulfill the needs of young women at Vassar and its sister schools. The classroom and the professor’s evaluation are key posts in the system which produces individuals—individuation on many scales and registers. So on this reading, there is nothing to balance—the examining function certifies that individuals are produced and suited for the workplace and social functions. (I pursued this topic with colleagues in some past college courses, including “Between the Acts: Literary, Sexual, and Academic.”)

²⁴ Renwick’s ruin is on the National Register of Historic Places.

But I think this system is a bit of a ruin, which I've tried to palpitate with irony and humor, by critique, by debunking, by pioneering new topics and methods, by introducing critical sources and researches. In my teaching, within this ruin, so to speak, I've attempted relevant genealogies and deconstructions.

Can Vassar, as an institution, escape this “ruin”? Is there a conflict between surveillance and ensuring the welfare of students? Many of Vassar’s regulations are required by federal mandates or were established under fear of civil liability. Vassar is not the Institution, but is constrained by larger structures.

No, Vassar cannot escape this “ruin” since it is not only Vassar’s condition; we all live in the ruins of disciplinary society. Yet, I would suggest that Vassar is far freer than many institutions because it affords space and occasion to carry out critique, engage in ruination and invention. No, to the second query, because the project of “ensuring the welfare of students” just *is* what surveillance provides, although it’s a ruin. With regard to your last remark, I think states and federal governments now do and will count for less. Vassar does not fit into a box that is the state or the state into a box that is the federal nation. After all, Vassar’s founding was a creative event and a scandal—providing higher education for women! We who maintain and renew the college—current students and faculty—are already outside of ourselves, interacting with the world. Thus we remain ex-centrics.

Has one of your preoccupations been to bring your students toward the good life? And, how has your notion of the good life been reshaped by your relationship with students?

Yes, to the first, in the sense of shared learning, sharing my love of learning, of what I’ve found out in my studies and writings, and of learning from students’ own questions, puzzlements, and discoveries. Active learning is the good life—it belongs to such a life, it’s not just a means to an end. New learning, new discovery, new recognition is something inherently youthful, and real philosophical thinking always involves a youthful experience.

Amazement. Birth of thought, of ideas, of interpretations, of friendships. This resonates across decades of my teaching life, directing theses, discussing papers, advising, debating, long hours talking with young men and women. My own sense of the good life has indeed been inspired by constant contact with young minds and with my colleagues, of course. So not just ‘my notion of the good life’ but the good life itself! Philosophers ask disarmingly simple questions, akin to those of children. When I drove my son Stephen to nursery school, strapped in the backseat, he would ask questions like, “Dad, what’s beyond space?” Or, “Why is the sun following us?” To the first he had an answer, “More space.”

The simple questions you mention are in response to complex contexts. How do simple questions relate to these situations and what types of answers can unfold?

The questions are simple, but the answers may be diverse and open-ended (eg. about space—are talking about lived existential spatiality, objective spatiality, regional or cosmological spatiality, etc. and how all these interconnect.)

The tradition associates longevity and the good life. Do you agree? How should we understand the goodness of the lives of those who die young?

These are important questions you ask, about old age and short-lived lives. I was speaking before about the pleasures of youthful learning and philosophy’s bond with it. Sometimes taking a long hike or lifting heavy boxes reminds me of my age, but in the throes of thought, of finding out things, age disappears.

Goodness and the youthfully dead pose immediately a poignant question. We may think last year of our remarkable student and friend Jamie Greenberg,²⁵ who had a promising career in philosophy and was beloved by many. In the *Duino Elegies*, the poet Rilke writes memorable lines on how we are so struck by the youthfully dead. A good life, cut short, but for us most certainly a

²⁵ A member of Vassar’s class of 2012, who passed away on April 4, 2013.

good life! But this raises a broader essential question—the relation of death to a good life, or the question of a good death. Since life is being toward death, death is an essential relation of all of us, at whatever our age, our own being toward death, being with our fellow mortals, and our experience of those who die. This is not just a question for old age. We are all aging together, are mortals together. We will all retire. The penchant of the young perhaps is to forget their mortality, while the penchant of the old is to forget their natality.

If the crux of life is everywhere, a life of dis-closure, dis-covery, and un-covering, then living truth means a process of un-concealment, an ongoing happening out of concealment, shadow, hiddenness. A good life is a life of living out of truth. A true life (an authentic life) contests the seductive inauthentic possibilities of everyday life. You ask, “*Is truth the same as authenticity?*” Authenticity is the truth of human existence, which relates to other kinds of truth—of things, of works, of products, of sciences, of technologies, of Being. Taking responsibility for a good and true life finally also involves self-shaping and self-care wherein each of us attempts to fashion a beautiful life, whose brilliance lets the good and true shine forth. In the end, the finitude of life must shatter and break up in death, overwhelmed by concealment and brilliance ruined at life’s end. The good life ends tragically, all care worn out, which is why we mourn and why we tell stories about its course.



The Vassar College Journal of Philosophy
 Rockefeller Hall, Room 209
 124 Raymond Avenue
 Poughkeepsie, NY 12604
 Philosophyjournal@vassar.edu

The Vassar College Journal of Philosophy is a student-run publication supported by the Vassar College Philosophy Department and the Vassar Student Association. Dedicated to both quality and accessibility, the Journal seeks to give undergraduate students from all disciplines a platform to express and discuss philosophical ideas.

All those interested in submitting a paper to the Spring 2015 issue of the journal are invited to review the submission guidelines listed below. Every issue of the journal has an overall theme, but submissions ranging across a variety of topics are welcome as long as they can be related to that theme. Next year's theme will be posted on our website in the Fall.

Any further questions about *The Vassar College Journal of Philosophy* can be directed to philosophyjournal@vassar.edu

Submission Guidelines

Format: 12 point Times New Roman font, 4000 word maximum for the paper, 100 word maximum for the abstract. There is no minimum word count, provided that the topic of the paper is suitably addressed. Papers should not include your name or other identifying information. Please provide your paper title, name, email, and major in a *separate attachment*.

Citation Format: Chicago Citation Style.

Topic: The theme for our upcoming issue will be posted in September 2015 on philosophy.vassar.edu

Submission: All materials must be submitted via email to philosophyjournal@vassar.edu
 The deadline will be posted online along with the Journal's theme.

Originality: Only original work that has not been previously published will be accepted. If you plan on submitting your paper to publications other than *The Vassar College Journal of Philosophy*, please keep the Board informed about its publication status.

Submissions that fail to meet these guidelines will not be accepted.