Happiness has perhaps been the focal point of and most seductive issue in philosophical discussions on ethics. While many, such as Aristotle and Mill, take it to be the end of all human activity, almost all (if not all) philosophers acknowledge that it is a valuable, if not essential, component of a good life.

We shall find, however, as we subject it to philosophic analysis, that happiness proves as slippery as it is alluring. First, though most recognize its indispensability, there is no philosophic consensus on its nature. For example, among the early Greeks, Socrates, Plato tells us, states that happiness is virtue, which he tends to equate with knowledge. Aristotle defines it as virtuous activity. Plato in *Republic* sees it as a form of justice. The Epicureans and Cyrenaics identify it as pleasure, but disagree on what pleasure is. In modern times, Freud states that happiness is erotic satisfaction. The philosopher Immanuel Kant says happiness is a moral exercise of duty. John Stuart Mill links it to the freedom for self-determination.

There is also a second philosophic issue: Happiness for whom? Ought I to regard my own happiness as paramount? If so, to what extent? If not, how does the happiness of others factor into how I ought to act? These questions are themselves engaging, but they also invite serious philosophical discussion on a host of other intriguing issues, such as, Ought I to be just, Do I have a duty to others? What part does love play in a good life? And even, Is happiness possible?

Finally, for those who take happiness to be an end of human activity, is it the sole end? For nonconsequentialists, what is the role of happiness in a good life?

The selections that follow focus on happiness as it concerns four other gripping issues in philosophical thought (though there are others that could be included): justice, friendship, eroticism, and integration. The first two readings concern justice and happiness. Plato argues that happiness is linked to justice and duty to one’s city-state. Mill states that true justice obliges us
to acknowledge that happiness consists of the autonomy of individuals. The
next two selections concern friendship and happiness. While Aristotle posits
that friendship is a virtue toward which we ought to strive, because it con-
duces to happiness, Epicurus argues that friendship, like happiness, is merely
instrumental for pleasure. The next readings concern eroticism and happi-
ness. Plato tries to show that eroticism, properly channeled, leads to happi-
ness through a “vision” of true beauty. Freud, in contrast, proposes that
happiness is merely the pleasure we derive from release of dammed up erotic
impulses. The last two readings—Russell and Holowchak—explore the
manner in which happiness involves integrating ourselves with ourselves,
our society, and our world. First Russell argues that much of our own happi-
ness comes from cultivating a rational and “friendly interest” in external
events. Holowchak, then, contends that happiness is integration of self with
self, with society, and, even more, with the cosmos itself.

**Suggested Further Reading**

Annas, Julia. “Epicurus on Pleasure and Happiness.” *Philosophical Topics* 15


Berger, R. R. *Happiness, Justice, and Freedom: The Moral and Political Philosophy

Cooper, John M. “Aristotle on Friendship.” In *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*. Ed.

Cooper, John M. “Friendship and the Good in Aristotle.” In *Aristotle’s Ethics: Criti-

Cornford, F. M. “The Doctrine of Eros in Plato’s Symposium.” In *Plato: A Collection
of Critical Essays*, vol. 2: Ethics, Politics, Philosophy of Art and Religion. Ed.


Robson, J. M. *The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of

Ryan, A. “John Stuart Mill’s Art of Living.” In *J. S. Mill On Liberty in Focus*. Eds. J.

