

Don't worry, be happy

May 8 2013

To most of the Western world, happiness is the number one goal, and a happy life is seen as a good life. But is it as simple as that?

Not according to Dan Weijers from Victoria University's School of History, Philosophy, [Political Science](#) and [International Relations](#), whose PhD research focuses on a range of issues – from happiness-seeking hedonists to the role of happiness in climate change.

"Hedonism is the theory that a happy life, with many positive emotions and little suffering, is a good life. But when most people think of a hedonist, they think of someone who pursues immediate gratification with no thought to the [consequences](#) for themselves and others.

"In my research I explain why this view is mistaken: hedonism is a theory about what is good for people, not who we should seek to provide this good to. The common view of hedonists really applies to hedonistic egoists, who think the right thing to do is to pursue their own happiness, even at the expense of others."

The graduand's research revealed that, in general, young people tend to the hedonistic perspective.

"My research included several experiments in which students were asked whether machine-generated lives full of [pleasure](#) were better than real lives. Contrary to existing philosophical opinion, the results showed that many young people endorse the hedonistic view that experiencing pleasure was more important than living in reality."

Dan also believes happiness can be viewed in a much wider context than [personal experience](#), including informing policy issues such as distributing the burden of climate change.

"The whole debate about climate change began because people rightly worried the future poor would suffer more due to extreme climate change events and [rising sea levels](#). By focusing on suffering, we see that the burdens of the future poor far outweigh the minor benefits to the (already happy) wealthy people provided by the unnecessary portion of their carbon emitting."

He also believes happiness has a key role to play in informing public policy.

"Research shows that happiness is about more than just money. Relationships and mental health contribute much more to our sense of wellbeing. Part of my research is aimed at encouraging policymakers to use happiness research as a constructive complement to existing policy measures."

Dan, who claims to be a "very happy person" co-founded the academic journal, International Journal of Wellbeing, to provide open access to happiness research. He has also advised policymakers on happiness and wellbeing, including being invited by the King of Bhutan (the only country to make Gross National Happiness its key objective) to attend the United Nations Meeting on [Happiness](#) and Wellbeing.

Dan is currently working as a Postdoctoral Fellow at Victoria University. He is hoping to author a book based on his findings.

More information: Dan will graduate with a PhD in Philosophy on Wednesday 15 May at 1.30pm.

Provided by Victoria University

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