Philosophy 100  
Final Paper Instructions  
Draft Due Week 11 Tutorial  
Final Paper Due Last Week of Classes, Before Last Lecture.

Overview

In *Stumbling On Happiness*, Gilbert explains in detail why we fail to imagine what will make us happy in the future, given the nature of perception, memory, and imagination. We also fail to learn from our mistakes (from what made us unhappy in the past). Nor do we seem learn from experience of other people, for one because we view ourselves as too different from other people to benefit from their experiences but also because they give us bad advice.

One example that Gilbert gives us is belief that having children will make us happy. Says Gilbert, Chapter 11….

“The belief-transmission game explains why we believe some things about happiness that simply aren’t true. The joy of money is one example. The joy of children is another that for most of us hits closer to home. Every human culture tells its members that having children will make them happy.”  p. 242

“When people are asked to identify their sources of joy, they do just what I do. They point to their kids. ….. Yet if we measure the actual satisfaction of people who have children, a very different story emerges.” P.243

What follows thereafter is a survey on marriage satisfaction in married people with children, showing a deep decline in marital happiness overall, with satisfaction hitting bottom when the children are aged 12-16. However, thereafter, marriage satisfaction increases and it takes a marked leap when the children leave home.

FINAL PAPER

The following three parts should flow together seamlessly when your paper is in its final form. I have separated the instructions into three parts only so that you do not miss any of the parts and so that the logic of the assignment is clear.

Part I

In prose, give a summary/overview of Gilbert’s thesis, using his conclusions from chapters 1-11. In other words, summarize what each part of the view is so that, in the next section, you can talk about and use it.

Part II
Using Gilbert’s theses about perception, memory, imagination, our failure to learn, and so on, make as good an argument as you can for the thesis that, in thinking about having children, we will not do very well at envisioning whether this will make us happy. (Part of this explanation will be Gilbert’s own explanation in terms of why false beliefs are transmitted. But there are many, many more reasons that Gilbert could have provided given his theory, which have to do with our abilities to predict.)

Part III

Do you think that the evidence that Gilbert gives, of the decrease in marital satisfaction following children (assume it is true) is good evidence that we (and societies in general) are wrong about the happiness of having children? Does the study that shows that the actual activities of looking after children are “only slightly more pleasant than doing housework” provide any better evidence? Why or why not? What kind of evidence do you think would be relevant to establishing this conclusion? What kinds of experiments would you have to conduct/questions would you have to ask/populations would you have to consider in order to obtain a reliable answer? In answering these questions you need to think carefully about the nature of scientific evidence/method as discussed in class.

HINTS

Below are some abstracts from actual experiments in psychology about having children, not having children, what makes people with children unhappy in marriage and so on. You are not expected to read these articles or even make reference to them in your essays. Rather, use these abstracts as helpful hints about the kinds of issues involved. They should be helpful to your answers in both Part I and Part II, both to what Gilbert would say about how we think about having children before we have them, and about what kinds of studies would be needed to prove the conclusion that having children tends to make people unhappy.

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   The purpose of the present study was to discriminate between the 2 dominant perspectives governing research on the nature of marital change over the transition to parenthood. Progress can be made in understanding this transition by recognizing the role of uncontrolled sources of variability in research designs, defining and using control groups, and timing of data collection around the child's arrival, and the authors conducted a study incorporating these methodological refinements. Growth curve analyses were
conducted on marital satisfaction data collected twice before and twice after the birth of the 1st child and at corresponding points for voluntarily childless couples (N = 156 couples). Spouses who were more satisfied prior to pregnancy had children relatively early in marriage, and parents experienced greater declines in marital satisfaction compared to nonparents. Couples with planned pregnancies had higher prepregnancy satisfaction scores, and planning slowed husbands' (but not wives') postpartum declines. In sum, parenthood hastens marital decline--even among relatively satisfied couples who select themselves into this transition--but planning status and prepregnancy marital satisfaction generally protect marriages from these declines.

   Infertility and parenthood: does becoming a parent increase well-being?
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   There is a large literature that demonstrates that infertility has a variety of negative effects on women's and men's well-being, but little is known about the impact of becoming a parent. The effects of parenthood were examined in a longitudinal study with both wives and husbands from 174 infertile couples and a comparison group of 74 presumed fertile couples. Infertile women who became parents experienced greater global well-being but diminished marital well-being, compared with infertile women who had not become parents. Infertile men who became parents experienced the same negative effects that their wives reported, but they did not experience positive effects to the same extent. Parental status had fewer positive and negative effects on members of presumed-fertile couples. These results are discussed in terms of gender differences in the meaning of parenthood, and their implications for research and clinical services are considered.

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   This study examined the integrative complexity of thinking in individuals making the transition to parenthood, and the relationship between complexity and adjustment during this period. Sixty-nine couples were interviewed 3 months before their babies were born, and 6 months after the birth. The prenatal interview focussed on individuals' expectations about what it would be like being a parent; the postnatal interview focussed on individuals' actual experiences as parents. In addition, participants completed measures of depression, self-esteem, and marital satisfaction after each interview, and a measure of stress after the 6-month postnatal interview. Both men and women demonstrated a significant increase in the complexity of their thinking from the prenatal to the postnatal
interview, with women demonstrating higher levels of complexity at both times. In addition, women with more complex expectations demonstrated better adjustment after their babies were born than did women with simpler expectations; these results were not obtained for men. Results are discussed with regard to the way in which thinking about the self changes as one negotiates major life transitions, and the way in which complex thinking can help counter some of the stresses that individuals may experience at these times.

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   AIM: This paper is a report on the examination of demographic, birthing and social correlates of maternal role development in childbearing women. BACKGROUND: Successful adaptation to the maternal role provides a mother with confidence and satisfaction in her ability to nurture and care for her infant. Despite the importance of this developmental process for maternal well-being, little attention has been given to social and demographic predictors of positive role development in recent years. METHODS: A prospective study was undertaken at three publicly-funded metropolitan antenatal clinics in Queensland, Australia between March and November 2003. A total of 605 women completed a survey at 36 weeks gestation and 12 weeks postpartum, with a response rate of 78% (n = 473). A self-report questionnaire was used to collect data about personal and birth variables, domestic violence, social support and maternal role development. FINDINGS: The majority of women (81%) were of White ethnic background, modal age was 30-45 years (40%, n = 189) and 66 percent (n = 312) were in paid employment. Bivariate analysis identified age, marital status, length of relationship and social support to be statistically significantly associated with maternal role development. Optimal scaling showed social support to be the most important factor in maternal role development. CONCLUSION: Maternal role development following childbirth is complex and can be adversely affected by older maternal age, married status, inadequate social support and short partner relationships. A deeper understanding of this process is needed if healthcare professionals are to assist mothers in making a smooth transition to motherhood.

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   BACKGROUND: Studies of women's memory of labor and birth have generally concluded that women's recall is fairly accurate, but the findings are not unanimous. The aim of this study was to compare women's experiences of labor pain and overall experience of the birth at 2 months and 1 year after the delivery. METHODS: A
longitudinal cohort study of 2,428 women recruited in early pregnancy from all antenatal clinics in Sweden during 3 weeks evenly spread during 1999-2000 was conducted. In addition to a questionnaire in early pregnancy including background data, the women completed a questionnaire at 2 months and 1 year after the birth including the same 7-point rating scale of pain intensity and the same question about overall experience of labor and birth. RESULTS: Forty-seven percent of the women made the same assessment of pain intensity, and 60 percent of childbirth overall, at 1 year as they did at 2 months after the birth. One year after the birth, 35 percent recalled pain as less severe, and 18 percent as more severe, and 24 percent said labor and birth overall was more negative, whereas 16 percent said it was more positive. CONCLUSION: This study showed great variation in women's memories of labor and birth, and conclusions by some other studies, often based on analyses of group data rather than on the responses of the individual participants were, to some extent, challenged.

6. Satisfactions and Regrets of Midlife Parents: A Qualitative Analysis
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Abstract. The study examined the satisfactions and regrets of midlife parents at a specific family life-cycle milestone, their child’s graduation from high school. The purpose was to compare mothers’ and fathers’ appraisals of the gains and losses associated with this developmental transition and turning point in their parenting roles. A total of 260 parents (147 mothers; 113 fathers) who had a child graduating from high school responded in writing to open-ended questions regarding their satisfactions and regrets at this stage of their lives. Responses were coded to identify themes salient to these parents. Results indicate that both mothers and fathers are aware of both the gains and losses at this time in their family life cycle, but they differed in how they expect to be affected by the transition. Mothers’ responses suggest that they are anticipating and planning for the transition. Fathers’ responses suggest they are less aware of the personal implications of this family transition and are less prepared for its emotional impact.