

Topical Film: Africa United

This film was made in 2010. It tells the story of three children from Rwanda, in Africa, who set out to travel 3000 miles across Africa to take part in the opening ceremony of the football World Cup.

The film is certificate 12, although it does not avoid some challenging questions about poverty, inequality, HIV and child soldiers. We think it has lots to teach us about what it means to be happy, and so that is the focus of the comments here.

Below are some key questions to consider. On the next two pages there are some reflections and information to help you think about these questions. Make sure you read the next two pages before you try to answer the questions.

A film blog... start here!

You may not be keen to write a load of essays, but how about starting a blog, talking about films you have watched, and commenting on the religious and philosophical questions that they raise?

Here are some questions to get you started when watching *Africa United*:

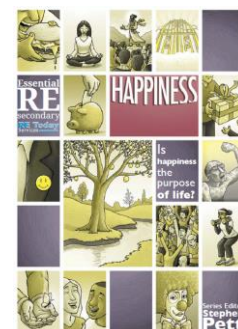
- Do you need money to be happy?
- How much is happiness dependent upon circumstances or upon your personality?
- Do you have to *feel* happy all the time to *be* happy?
- How far does having a goal in life affect our happiness?

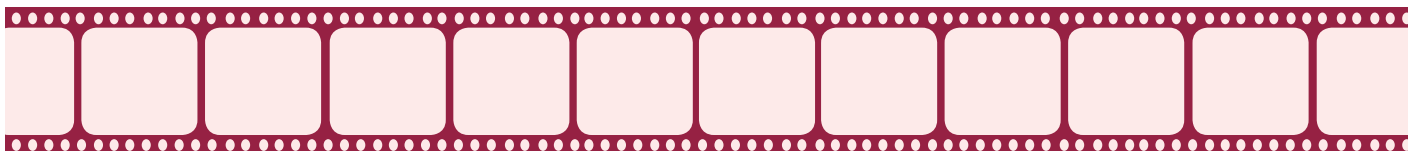
What other questions do you have? What other questions does the film raise for you?

This resource has been taken from

Essential RE: Happiness

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Topical film:

Africa United



Synopsis [contains spoilers!]

Dudu Kayenzi, a young AIDS orphan from Rwanda, persuades his football-prodigy friend Fabrice to try out for a trial to be part of the opening ceremony for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. With Dudu's younger sister, Beatrice, the children decide to get a bus to Kigali for the audition. However, through a series of mishaps they end up in Congo instead.

With no papers or money, they are taken to a refugee camp. There they meet Foreman George, a troubled teenager and child soldier who leads them out of the camp to escape the attentions of some of his fellow soldiers. Still pursued, they decide to make their way to Johannesburg in time for the opening ceremony. They cross Lake Tanganyika and meet Celeste, a teenager caught up in the sex trade, working at a smart resort. Celeste joins them in their adventures.

Out of money, Dudu takes them to an AIDS clinic, where cash incentives are offered for having HIV tests. Before long, Dudu falls for a scam as they cross into Zimbabwe, losing all the money. Overnight, Dudu falls ill with tuberculosis (TB) and the others manage to get him to a local mission hospital. Dudu's illness is stabilised but his friends are shocked to discover that he is HIV-positive and vulnerable to the TB, for which the hospital do not have the correct medication. Dudu persuades them they must continue their journey, but Beatrice decides she will stay at the mission hospital, where there is a space for her at the school.

The friends overcome more obstacles to make it to the stadium for the opening ceremony, but Dudu – optimistic to the last – succumbs to his illness and dies.

You might use *Africa United* to explore the following questions:



Do you need money to be happy?

Most people would agree that 'money can't buy you happiness'. A Gallup Poll in 2013 found that some of the poorest countries in the world are the happiest – including Panama, El Salvador and Paraguay. UK interest in our 'wellbeing' claims that, despite significant rises in material prosperity over the last decades, UK happiness has not increased. So, the message is: we must work harder at what makes us happy, not try to make more money!

At first sight, *Africa United* might support this view. After all, despite the poverty, illness, threat and danger that they face, Dudu and his friends often show signs that they are happy. Perhaps Dudu appears happier than Fabrice's relatively wealthy mother. But clearly the need for basic material goods are essential for survival – and it is rather patronising to suggest that people should make do with being 'poor but happy'. It is an easy view to take from our comparatively (excessively?) wealthy viewpoint, with our easy access to clean water, food, healthcare and education.

But, accepting that it would be better for Dudu and his friends to have these fundamental needs met, what is it that makes them happy? Are there things that are more important than material wellbeing?

Students might identify the group's friendship and mutual support in the face of challenges, their desire to make it to the end of their journey, and, for Beatrice, perhaps her clear and straightforward trust in God and the power of prayer. How far do any of these contribute to students' own happiness?

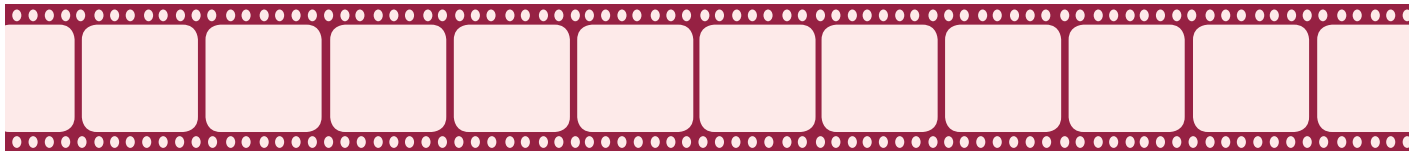


How much is happiness dependent upon circumstances or upon your personality?

Dudu is clearly a boy of irrepressible energy and enthusiasm. Despite being HIV-positive, his zest for life is inspiring. Is that down to his personality, or is it possible for people to rise above their circumstances?

Research¹ claims that only 10 per cent of our happiness is dependent upon our circumstances (income, education, neighbourhood and so forth); 50 per cent is dependent upon our 'set point', our general temperament, a combination of nature and nurture. However, this leaves 40 per cent of our happiness as a result of our 'intentional activities' – our motivations, things we choose to do and ways we choose to think. This is why organisations like Action for Happiness encourage a series of '10 keys to happier living'.²

While they await the HIV testing, each character responds differently. Celeste is afraid of the possible bad news. This fear of the unknown seems to be more debilitating than for Dudu, who does know that he is HIV-positive. Many therapies try to help people develop less fearful responses to what might happen – a way of changing our 'intentional activities'.



This book explores some of the ways in which religions encourage believers to direct their ‘intentional activities’ – students might explore the extent to which these lead to religious believers being happier than others.



Do you have to *feel* happy all the time to be happy?

The film is an optimistic presentation of what is in reality a dark and difficult life – these children have to face bereavement, illness, poverty, lack of education, violence and death. Most of our students thankfully do not generally face these kinds of pressures, but life is not all pleasure and happy emotions. Is it possible to *be* happy overall – to see through the times when you *feel* unhappy, the times of difficulty? This would require an understanding of happiness that is not just about feelings, of course. Perhaps a wider view of happiness in terms of overall life satisfaction allows us to handle difficult times.



How far does having a goal in life affect our happiness?

The decision to travel so that Fabrice can show his skills at the World Cup ceremony drives Dudu and his friends. They are caught up in this dream, and this gives them the motivation to keep going in the face of danger and setback. The excitement of the final attendance makes their trials seem worthwhile, and to offer a tribute to the memory of Dudu’s joyous spirit and energy. Beatrice’s goal of finding a cure for AIDS gives her the courage to leave her friends and seek an education at the mission hospital.

Evidence suggests that having an overall purpose for life can affect a person’s sense of happiness. This means that they maintain their equanimity in the face of difficulties, as they have a more important goal that transcends moment-to-moment feelings or more significant setbacks. It is plausible to suggest that this is one reason why people of religious faith routinely poll higher in terms of self-reported happiness than people with no religious faith. Most religions teach that there is some ultimate meaning and purpose to life, as well as offering a person the resources to cope with the exigencies of life. Their description of life’s meaning and purpose might be wrong, of course, and religious believers do not necessarily handle challenges better than anyone else, but how might people find benefit in the hope that religions offer?



Some texts to think about:

Jesus said: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ... Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ... But seek first [your heavenly Father’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.’

Matthew 6: 25–27, 33–34 [NIV]

We do not lose heart... For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16–18 [NIV]

All those who are unhappy in this world are so because they desire only their own happiness. All those who are happy in this world are so because they desire only the happiness of others.

Santideva, Bodhicaryavatara, Bk 3



Resources

- ¹ K M Sheldon and S Lyubomirsky, ‘Achieving sustainable new happiness: prospects, practices, and prescriptions’ in A Linley and S Joseph (eds) *Positive Psychology in Practice* (Hoboken, NJ): John Wiley & Sons 2004), pp.127–45.
- ² <http://www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys-to-happier-living>. See also p.15 in this volume.

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