

# The British amateur who debunked the mathematics of happiness

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## *The Guardian:*

Nick Brown does not look like your average student. He's 53 for a start and at 6ft 4in with a bushy moustache and an expression that jackknifes between sceptical and alarmed, he is reminiscent of a mid-period John Cleese. He can even sound a bit like the great comedian when he embarks on an extended sardonic riff, which he is prone to do if the subject rouses his intellectual suspicion.

A couple of years ago that suspicion began to grow while he sat in a lecture at the University of East London, where he was taking a postgraduate course in applied positive psychology. There was a slide showing a butterfly graph – the branch of mathematical modelling most often associated with chaos theory. On the graph was a tipping point that claimed to identify the precise emotional co-ordinates that divide those people who “flourish” from those who “languish”.

According to the graph, it all came down to a specific ratio of positive emotions to negative emotions. If your ratio was greater than 2.9013 positive emotions to 1 negative emotion you were flourishing in life. If your ratio was less than that number you were languishing.

Read the whole story: [\*The Guardian\*](#)