

PHL 375: Well-Being Summer 2017

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00–6:00 pm

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Lectures: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6:00–9:00 pm

Carr Hall 405

Description

To ask about an individual’s well-being is to ask what is intrinsically good for that individual. We have no trouble relating to this concept when we are not doing philosophy. We can make sense of claims such as “I’m having a good day” or “Her life didn’t go well”. Despite such colloquial language, philosophers have debated what constitutes an intrinsic good or bad for an individual for about as long as there has been written philosophy. Philosophically, we are concerned with what we mean when we talk about welfare and goodness. This course will survey some of the major theories of well-being and the contemporary debate surrounding it.

We will begin by attempting to clarify the concept of well-being. This is a surprisingly difficult question, and is part of the reason why there are so many theories on offer. In particular, we want to know what we want from a theory of well-being. Next we will turn to the three great theories, which go a long way toward exhausting all of the possible options in the literature. These are, first, hedonism, which holds that the good consists in the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain; the desire-satisfaction view, which holds that the good consists in our having fulfilled desires; and the objective list view, which holds that there are objectively good things, independently of what anyone thinks about them, the possession of which makes us intrinsically better off. We will then turn to some other possible theories before turning to away from theories toward features that might affect well-being more generally. In particular, we will look at two axiological topics: (1) the role that the shape of one’s life plays and (2) whether or not there are asymmetries between what is intrinsically good and bad in well-being.

Requirements

The goal of this course is for you to become familiar with some contemporary well-being literature. You need to learn what the options are and the strengths and weaknesses of them, but at its core philosophy is an active process. The goal of the papers is for you to give your own original arguments, not merely describe what others have written.

In contrast to lots of research, your main requirement for this course is easy to describe: you need to spend lots of time *thinking*. Doing well in this course requires demonstration that you have put considerable effort into the topics we will be considering. Philosophy progresses by communicating ideas to other philosophers, so once you have thought about these questions, the next step is to communicate your thoughts in a clear way. This is the purpose of the papers.

Grading

The first paper must be no longer than 1,500 words. The second paper must be no longer than 2,000 words. Please use standard formatting: 1 inch (2.54 cm) margins with 12-point, Times New Roman (or another suitable serif) font. For the second paper, you can write on any topic related to the course, provided that you didn't write on that topic for your shorter paper. Check with me if you are unsure what 'that topic' consists of. Late papers will not be accepted without a justified reason and appropriate documentation.

For the taxonomy assignment, you are required to make a taxonomy diagram of well-being theories. It should fit on a single page. It should be accompanied by a short—i.e., no more than a page—explanation of your taxonomy.

Paper 1 (Due June 2nd)	25%
Taxonomy Diagram (Due June 16th)	10%
Paper 2 (Due June 23rd)	35%
Final Exam	30%

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence that many students commit unintentionally. It is your responsibility to know what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. In particular, for this course, you are required to give a citation whenever you discuss someone else's work. This is true regardless of whether you directly quote the author or, alternatively, summarize the author's ideas in your own words. This course, and philosophy in general, has no agreed-upon style guide. You can use whichever method you prefer, so long as I can find the relevant passage. Most importantly, *you must provide page numbers*. Here are two examples:

Direct quotation: In the introduction of *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit says “Like my cat, I often simply do what I want to do” (p. ix).

Summarization: In the introduction of *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit describes how he often behaves like his cat by acting in whatever way he wants to (p. ix).

If you are unsure how to properly cite something, consult one of the following sources: [The Writing Centre website](#); [one of the physical writing centres](#); or me, the instructor. For more information on academic integrity, please consult the [university’s webpage](#).

Contacting the Instructor

I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours. If you email me, please include the course code in the subject or body of the message. If you are unable to attend my office hour (right before class) we can usually arrange to meet another time either in person or via Skype, Google Hangouts, or some other medium.

Reading Schedule

There is no assigned textbook or reading pack for this course. All of the readings are either available for free online or will be made available on Blackboard.

Reading Schedule

Week 1: What We Talk About When We Talk About Well-Being

- Shelly Kagan, “Me and My Life,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 94 (1994): 309–324.
- Wayne Sumner, “The Concept of Welfare,” from *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*.
- Derek Parfit, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best?” from *Reasons and Persons*, 494–499.

Week 2: Hedonism

- John Stuart Mill, “Chapter 2,” from *Utilitarianism*.
- Roger Crisp, “Hedonism Reconsidered,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73:3 (2006): 619–645.

- Fred Feldman, “The Good Life: A defence of attitudinal hedonism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2002): 604–628.
- Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine,” from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.
- “San Junipero,” *Black Mirror*.

Week 3: Desire Theories

Paper 1 due Friday, June 2nd

- Chris Heathwood, “Desire-Fulfilment Theory,” *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*, 135–147.
- Dale Dorsey, “Desire-Satisfaction and Welfare as Temporal,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16:1 (2013): 151–171.
- Mark Murphy, “The Simple Desire-Fulfillment Theory,” *Nous* 33:2 (1999): 247–272.

Week 4: Objective Theories

- Gwen Bradford, chapter 1 from *Achievement*.
- Guy Fletcher, “A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being,” *Utilitas* 25:2 (2013): 206–220.
- John Finnis, “Parts III and IV,” from *Natural Law and Natural Rights*.
- Rosalind Hursthouse, chapter 8 from *On Virtue Ethics*.

Week 5: Other Options

Last day to drop without academic penalty is June 12th

Taxonomy diagram due June 16th

- Wayne Sumner, “Welfare and Happiness,” from *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*.
- Fred Feldman, “Whole Life Satisfaction Concepts of Happiness,” *Theoria* 74:3 (2008): 219–238.
- Shelly Kagan, “Well-Being as Enjoying the Good,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 23:1 (2009): 253–272.

Week 6: Axiology and Asymmetries

Paper 2 due Friday, June 23rd

- Dale Dorsey, “The Significance of a Life’s Shape”.
- Jamie Mayerfeld, excerpt from *Suffering and Moral Responsibility*.
- Tom Hurka, “Asymmetries in Value,” *Nous* 44:2 (2010): 199–223.