

ADVANCED SEMINAR IN PHILOSOPHY: THE GOOD LIFE

Spring 2018

Course number: 21.730.485

Room: Conklin Hall, Rm. 302

Meeting times: Monday and Wednesday 10-11:20 am

Credits: 3

Prerequisites: Two prior courses in philosophy or permission of chair/instructor.

Professor: Camil Golub

Department of Philosophy

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Office hours: Monday 2-3:30 pm, and by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

What makes our lives go well? Is it a matter of how *happy* we are? Or does it all come down to getting what we want? Or are the best things in life independent of what we want and enjoy? Is morality, for instance, a necessary ingredient of a life well lived? What about achieving great things, or having good friends? What would it take for our lives to be *meaningful*, and how does that relate to how *good* our lives are? In this course we will explore these and other central questions in the philosophy of the good life. We will also examine how different conceptions of the good life bear on other ethical questions that we all face. For instance, is death bad for us, and why? And how should we make important choices in life, such as deciding what career to pursue, or whether to have a child?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Summarize major theories of well-being and important arguments for and against these theories.
- Summarize and critically discuss different views on the connection between morality and the good life.
- Summarize and critically discuss different conceptions of meaning in life.
- Compare and evaluate different views on the badness of death.
- Propose and defend a personal position on how we should make important life choices.

READINGS

There is no assigned textbook for this course. All readings will be made available on Blackboard. *Please do the assigned readings before the class meeting that they're listed under.*

BLACKBOARD

You must get access to Blackboard (<http://blackboard.rutgers.edu>) and check it regularly. In addition to making available all of the readings there, I will also use Blackboard to update the syllabus and to make announcements. The email address that you have registered on Blackboard must be one that you check regularly. If you have trouble with Blackboard, contact the Newark Computing Services Help Desk (Hill Hall 109, help@newark.rutgers.edu, or 973-353-5083).

ASSESSMENT

Your final grade will include the following seven components, aligned with our learning goals:

- 15% Participation (small-group work and contributions to class discussions).
- 15% Homework assignments (150-250 words), due before each class between January 21-February 21.
- 10% First response paper (cca. 750 words), due on March 11.
- 15% Second response paper (cca. 750 words), due on April 1.
- 20% “Compare and evaluate” paper (cca. 1000 words), due on April 15.
- 5% Outline for the final essay (one page), due on May 2.
- 20% Final essay (cca. 1500 words), due on May 9.

You will receive a numerical grade between 0-10 for each component. Together, these grades will determine your final numerical grade for the course, which will be translated into a letter grade according to the following scale:

- A: 9-10. B+: 8.6-9. B: 8-8.6. C+: 7.6-8. C: 7-7.6. D: 6-7. F: below 6.

The lower bound is included and the upper bound is excluded in each of these intervals (except the “A” interval, where both bounds are included). For example: if you get an 8.6, your grade is B+; if you get an 8.99, your grade is B+; and if you get a 9.0, your grade is A. All papers (except for the homework assignments) must be submitted through Blackboard.

Participation: Your participation grade will be based on your contributions to class discussions and small-group work in class, which I will keep track of throughout the term. If you come to every class and make an honest effort to participate in discussions and small-group work, you need not worry about this grade. At the same time, please keep in mind that you will lose participation points for any class that you miss without a legitimate excuse (e.g., illness or family emergency).

Homework assignments: During the first part of the term (January 21-February 21), you will have to complete a short homework assignment (150-250 words) before each class. Each assignment will involve two tasks: (i) summarize one argument in the assigned reading ; (ii) illustrate that argument with an example of your own, OR identify what you take to be the most contentious premise in the argument. Each assignment must be emailed to me **by 8 pm on the day before the corresponding class**, and will be graded on a 1-4 scale. (1 is “unsatisfactory”, 4 is “excellent”.) If you fail to submit a homework assignment on time, you will get 0 points for it. Your final grade for these homework assignments will be based on your total number of points. There will be ten homework assignments, but I will drop your lowest score, so only your best nine scores will count toward your homework grade.

Response papers: You will write two response papers, cca. 750 words each. The **first response paper** is **due on March 11**, on the topic “Morality and the good life”. The **second paper** is **due on April 1**, on the topic “Meaning in life”. These papers will involve three tasks: (i) summarize a philosophical view on the given topic and one argument for that view; (ii) develop one objection to that view/argument; (iii) discuss a potential response to that objection.

“Compare and evaluate” paper: This paper (cca. 1,000 words) is **due on April 15** and will involve three main tasks: (i) summarize two different philosophical views on the badness of death; (ii) critically compare the two views by some important arguments for/against each view; (iii) use that comparison to arrive at a judgment with respect to which view is more plausible.

Final essay: In this essay (cca. 1,500 words), you will defend a personal position on how we should make important life choices, focusing on one particular choice as a case study. Possible topics include, but are not limited to: What career should I choose? Should I have a child? The essay should engage with different views on the rationality of hard choices, as well as other relevant theories discussed

throughout the term, i.e. philosophical views on well-being, morality and the good life, or meaning in life. A **one-page outline** for the final essay is **due by 8 pm on May 2**. I will give you feedback on this outline and will expect you to rely on my comments in writing the final essay. The **full essay** is **due by 8 pm on May 9**.

NB There will be *no* extra credit assignments and *no* opportunities to re-do assignments.

POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

- **Attendance:** You must make an effort to attend all lectures. However, you are allowed three excused absences. If you have a total of four absences, your final grade will be reduced by 0.3 points: for instance, a final grade of 8.6 (B+) will be reduced to 8.3 (B). **If you are absent five or more times, you will not pass this course.** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class, so please be on time. I will count two late arrivals as one absence.
- **Late work policy:** I won't accept any late papers unless you have asked for an extension *before the deadline*. That is, if you do not submit a paper on time and have not asked for an extension, you will get no points for that assignment. If you do ask for an extension, you will normally get it, but your grade will be docked 10% (e.g., from 10 to 9) for every day late, including weekends and holidays. Moreover, the new due date you are given is firm and must be met. There will be no additional extensions. Extensions without penalty will be given only in extraordinary circumstances, e.g. sudden illness. Computer problems or having a busy schedule are not extraordinary circumstances.
 - The late work policy does *not* apply to homework assignments, for which there will be no extensions. If you fail to submit a homework assignment on time without a legitimate excuse, you will get 0 points for it. If you do have a good excuse for failing to submit a homework assignment (e.g. sudden illness, properly documented), I will simply leave that assignment out of your grade.
- **Email and office hours:** Please email me if you have any questions that are not answered on the syllabus and can be addressed in a few sentences. I will normally reply within 24 hours, except during weekends, holidays, and university breaks. If a longer discussion is needed, please visit me during office hours. (If you can't make it on Monday afternoon, we can meet at other times during the week.)
 - Please use a professional tone in your emails. E.g., don't start your emails with "Hey".
- **Classroom conduct:**
 - You're welcome to express disagreement, but please treat everyone respectfully at all times. In particular, don't interrupt others: raise your hand when you want to speak.
 - Do not use your phones during class for *any* purpose.
 - I strongly advise you not to use your laptops or tablets during class, as there is increasing evidence that the use of electronic devices decreases learning and results in lower grades. If you do use a laptop/tablet to take notes or look at the readings, you *must* sit in a place where no other student is exposed to your screen. (Even just sitting in the vicinity of a distracting screen can negatively impact learning.) And of course, don't use your laptop for things like email, Facebook, etc.
 - You are expected to arrive on time and to stay for the entire class.
 - I will end the class on time. Do not start packing up before we're done.

SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to change. Always check the most recent version of the syllabus on Blackboard.

W Jan 17 Introduction

What is this course about? What are our goals? What kind of work will you do, and why?

No assigned reading

Theories of well-being

M Jan 22 Hedonism

Reading: Guy Fletcher, “Hedonism” (pp. 8-14),

W Jan 24 Objections to hedonism (1): the experience machine

Readings: Robert Nozick, “Happiness” (selections); Fletcher, “Hedonism” (pp. 14-19)

M Jan 29 Objections to hedonism (2): the philosophy of swine

Readings: J.S. Mill, “Hedonism” (pp. 17-21); Fletcher, “Hedonism” (pp. 19-24)

W Jan 31 Desire-fulfillment theories

Reading: Fletcher, “Desire-fulfillment theory” (pp. 27-41)

M Feb 5 Objections to desire-fulfillment theories: defective desires (1)

Reading: Chris Heathwood, “The problem of defective desires”

W Feb 7 Objections to desire-fulfillment theories: irrelevant desires (2)

Reading: Mark Lukas, “Desire satisfactionism and the problem of irrelevant desires”

M Feb 12 Objective list theories

Reading: Fletcher, “Objective list theories”

W Feb 14 Perfectionism

Reading: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections); Gwen Bradford, “Perfectionism”

M Feb 19 Perfectionism (2)

Reading: Gwen Bradford, “The value of achievements”

W Feb 21 What can science tell us about the nature of well-being?

Reading: Jonathan Haidt, “The pursuit of happiness”

Morality and the good life

M Feb 26 Is virtue a necessary ingredient of well-being?

Reading: Anne Baril, “Virtue and well-being”

W Feb 28 Is virtue a necessary ingredient of well-being? (2)

Reading: Mauro Rossi and Christine Tappolet, “Virtue, happiness, and well-being”

M Mar 5 Does morality always override self-interest?

Reading: Peter Singer, “Famine, affluence, and morality”

W Mar 7 Is there anything wrong with being as morally good as possible?

Reading: Susan Wolf, “Moral saints”

- **First response paper due on Sunday, March 11, 5 pm.**

Meaning in life

M Mar 19 Taylor on the meaning of life

Reading: Charles Taylor, "The meaning of life"

W Mar 21 Wolf on meaning in life

Reading: Susan Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*, Ch. 1

M Mar 26 Wolf on meaning in life (2)

Reading: Susan Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*, Ch. 2

W Mar 28 Meaning and the shape of a life

Reading: Antti Kauppinen, "Why the shape of a life matters"

- **Second response paper due on Sunday, April 1, 5 pm.**

Is death bad for us?

M Apr 2 The Epicurean argument

Readings: Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" (selections); Lucretius, "On the Nature of Things" (selections)

W Apr 4 The deprivation account of the badness of death

Reading: Thomas Nagel, "Death"

M Apr 9 The desire account of the badness of death

Reading: Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality" (pp. 82-89)

W Apr 11 Is immortality undesirable?

Reading: Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality" (pp. 89-100)

- **"Compare and evaluate" paper due on Sunday, April 15, 5 pm.**

Hard choices

M Apr 16 What career should I choose? The effective altruism approach

Reading: William MacAskill, "Replaceability, career choice, and making a difference"

W Apr 18 What career should I choose? The effective altruism approach (2)

Readings: Carissa Véliz, "If you want to do the most good, maybe you shouldn't work for Wall Street"; Amia Srinivasan, "Stop the robot apocalypse"

M Apr 23 Should I have a child? The problem of transformative experiences

Reading: L.A. Paul, "What you can't expect when you're expecting"

W Apr 25 Should I have a child? The problem of transformative experiences (2)

Reading: Elizabeth Harman, "Transformative experiences and the reliance on moral testimony"

M Apr 30 Hard choices and commitment

Reading: Ruth Chang, "Hard choices"

- **Outline for final essay due on Wednesday, May 2, 8 pm.**
- **Final essay due on Wednesday, May 9, 8 pm.**

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

- As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community. You must familiarize yourselves with the university's Academic Integrity Policy: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>.
- In our case, the most important rule is: *do not plagiarize on homework assignments and papers*. Plagiarism is not only a major ethical violation (equivalent to theft and fraud), but it undermines our learning goals and the whole point of getting a university education, so I take it very seriously. If I discover that you have cheated, you will incur serious penalties, including (but not limited to) receiving a failing grade in the course. I will vigorously investigate any suspicious case.

DISABILITY SERVICES

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the university's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must complete and submit the Registration Form, schedule and complete an intake meeting, and submit appropriate documentation. If your request for reasonable accommodations is approved, you will receive a Letter of Accommodations (LOA), which you should present privately to me as early in the semester as possible. Accommodations are not retroactive and are effective only upon submission of the LOA to me. Please begin the process by completing and submitting the Registration Form, available at the website below, Applying for Services.

- Applying for Services: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-services>
- Documentation Guidelines: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>
- Letter of Accommodations (LOA): <https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letter-of-accommodations>
- Office of Disability Services (ODS)

Suite 219, Paul Robeson Campus Center, (973) 353-5315, odsnewark@rutgers.edu

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY POLICY

Please notify me well in advance if you will miss a class, or cannot meet a deadline, due to observing a religious holiday. You will be responsible for making up the work according to an agreed-upon schedule.

NOTE: The last day to drop a class with no penalty is January 23, 2018. The last day to withdraw from a class with a "W" grade is March 26, 2018.