

Well-Being, Value, and the Meaning of Life

PHL 407, Winter 2023

Wednesdays 12-3pm, NF (Northrop Frye) 205

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- Office:** Jackman Humanities Building (170 St. George St), Room 424
- Office hours:** Tuesdays 10am-12pm
Sign-up sheet:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1XnH0wYImXjYtmnJu30OXMMof0zUzgntV4IpZ6CX_j70/edit?usp=sharing
- Website:** <https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/296576>
- Readings:** All readings for the course can be downloaded from the course website.
- Music:** Nominate your favorite music to be played before class and during breaks by...
(1) Adding to the class Spotify playlist:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/05SigHmrhV600HFjMo4Yvf?si=2c19b48ecce744c2&pt=89fc8898931603dbb3f99707ba13eb62>
(2) Filling out this Google form: <https://forms.gle/pimKLgfhc9DSJpNh6>
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course investigates several topics under the broad heading of value theory: what is valuable, and what is it to be valuable? We will focus on three value concepts: well-being, or what is good for a person; goodness ‘simpliciter’; and meaning in life.

Questions we will investigate include: what is it for a person to be well-off, or have a good life? Which concept is more fundamental, ‘good’ or ‘good for’? What is it to be good? What are the bearers of value: states of affairs, or things like persons or beautiful objects? What is it for a life to be meaningful? What is the value of pursuing achievement? And finally, is the meaning or value of our lives diminished by our cosmic insignificance relative to the enormity of space and time?

MARKING AND EXPECTATIONS

Mark breakdown

In-class attendance and participation: 15%
Quercus discussion participation: 20%
First paper: 25%
Final paper: 40%

There will be no final exam.

In-class participation (15%)

Your in-class participation mark will be based on your attendance and participation in class discussion and in-class exercises. I expect you to show up, to be prepared, and to take part in the conversation. You should attend every class, unless you are sick or have an emergency. You should come to class *prepared*: having read the assigned readings and, ideally, having thought of some questions to ask about them.

In-class discussion is the most important part of an advanced seminar like this one. In my experience, the best way to make progress in philosophy is to wrestle through the issues in conversation with your peers. The more each of you speaks up, the more fun and illuminating the class will be for everyone.

Quercus discussion participation (20%)

In addition to in-class conversation, we will also use Quercus's discussion forum. You will write a short, informal response to each week's readings on the discussion page on the class website. Your response can raise a question about one of the readings, explain why you agree or disagree with some claim of the author's, propose a relevant example, respond to another student's post, or anything else that shows engagement with the ideas in the readings.

Discussion posts will be marked complete or incomplete. Your overall discussion participation mark will be based on the proportion of weeks you receive a 'complete' mark.

- To receive a 'complete' mark, a discussion post should demonstrate that you have read and thought about at least one of the readings assigned for the week.
- I expect posts to be more than one or two sentences, but they don't need to be longer than a paragraph.
- If you have posted on Quercus by the deadline, you can assume that your post has been marked 'complete' unless I contact you and tell you otherwise. I will let you know if I am concerned that your post is not sufficiently substantive or engaged with the reading.
- There will be no Quercus discussion for the first class.

Discussion posts for each week are due **by 11:59pm on Tuesday night** before class. If you post after this deadline but before class, your post will receive half credit. Posts submitted after the start of class will receive no credit.

Papers (25% and 40%)

There will be two paper assignments:

- A first, shorter paper (6-8 pages, double-spaced in 12 point font). This paper will be worth 25% of your total grade, and will be due on **Wednesday, March 1st at 12:00pm.**
- A longer final paper (10-15 pages, double-spaced in 12 point font). This paper will be worth 40% of your total grade, and will be due on **Wednesday, April 5th at 12:00pm.**

Both papers should be submitted online via Quercus. All papers must be submitted **before the start of class** on the day they are due. You will be free to choose the topic of both papers (within certain constraints), but I'll also hand out some suggestions for topics.

COURSE POLICIES

Late papers

Late papers will lose 3 points per day they are late, up to a maximum late penalty of 30 points. Papers turned in more than 10 days late can receive credit, but the 30 point penalty will be applied.

Papers turned in after the start of class on the due date are considered one day late. A paper turned in more than 24 hours after the time it was due (i.e. after 12:00pm the day after the due date) is two days late; and so on.

Extensions

My view on extensions is this: it's important that you have *a* deadline, but not very important *when* that deadline is. So, I am happy to grant an extension for any reason so long as it is requested **more than 48 hours** before the official deadline.

To streamline this process, I've created Google forms that you can use to request an extension any time before the 48-hour cutoff.

Google form for First Paper extensions: <https://forms.gle/TBDssNF2h5Zvm3jq6>

Google form for Final Paper extensions: <https://forms.gle/U5dqEUCnhRFJ6oHp7>

Simply visit these links, enter your UofT email address, student ID number, and your desired extension length (up to one week maximum), and *voila!* – you have an extension. No need to email me to confirm or explain: your paper will be counted as due on the date you set in the form.

- Note: Quercus will automatically say that your paper is 'late', but don't worry, I will apply the extended deadline.

48 hours before the paper is due (i.e. Monday before the deadline at 12:00pm), the form will automatically stop accepting responses. After that point, I will not grant extensions unless you have a note from your doctor, registrar, or accessibility advisor. The same policy applies to extensions that go beyond the extension you requested on the Google form (or the maximum 7 days).

IMPORTANT: After you submit an extension request, **double-check that you have received a confirmation email** from Google. If you have not received an email, you should assume that your extension request has not gone through and submit it again. Also, make sure to **save the confirmation email**: if your extension request doesn't show up on the form, I'll ask you to show me the confirmation you received.

Excused absences from class or Quercus discussions

If you miss class or fail to post to the Quercus discussion one week and you think your absence should be excused, send me an email telling me why. Absences due to illness and emergencies will be excused; absences due to having too much work will not.

Email communication

I will try to answer your emails within 1-2 days of receiving them. To make this task manageable, please respect the following guidelines:

- If you have a practical question about the course schedule, assignments, or requirements, please consult the course website and syllabus first before emailing me.
- If you want to request an extension, don't send me an email – just fill out the Google Form!
- If you have a substantive question about the course material or your essays, please come to office hours and ask it in person.
- I won't be able to read over drafts of your essays or provide comments over email. I am happy to discuss your drafts in office hours. To get detailed feedback on a rough draft, you can also visit the Philosophy Essay Clinic (see 'Resources' section below).

Academic honesty and plagiarism

It should go without saying that your papers must be your own work. There is an easy way to avoid academic dishonesty: **cite everything you don't think of and write entirely on your own.** Better to cite too much than too little. Acknowledge anything that has helped you write your paper with a citation or footnote:

- If you quote something verbatim, make sure it appears between quotation marks and that you identify the source and the page numbers you are quoting from.
 - This applies to *any* text you didn't write yourself, including text from class handouts. **Any text from the handouts must be quoted and cited** as you would with any other source.
- If you paraphrase something you read, add a footnote citing the source and page numbers of the passage you are paraphrasing.
- If you read something helpful, add a footnote citing the source and acknowledging that it helped you with the paper – even if you aren't paraphrasing it directly. An example: “My thinking about this paper has been helped by the article “Well-Being” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/well-being/>”

- If you get an idea from a conversation with a friend or anyone else, then acknowledge their help in a footnote. Example: “Thanks to my roommate Justin Bieber for suggesting this response to my objection to Hurka’s argument.” (Philosophers do this all the time!)

The University of Toronto treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University’s policies and procedures regarding academic honesty can be found in its *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, available at:

<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>

More information is available at <https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you are in any doubt about whether something you are doing constitutes academic dishonesty, ask me.

Ouriginal plagiarism detection tool

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University’s plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool’s reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://teaching.utoronto.ca/resources/plagiarism-detection/>).

Your papers will be reviewed by Ouriginal by default when you submit them on the Quercus course website. Use of Ouriginal is **voluntary**: if you wish to opt out of having your papers reviewed by Ouriginal, email me and we will set up an alternative arrangement.

ChatGPT and AI text generators

Many of you will have heard the buzz about ChatGPT, the remarkably capable text-generating AI that came out last year. You may have also heard the buzz about ChatGPT being able to write essay assignments. Let me be clear: **using ChatGPT or any AI text generator to write any portion of your essays constitutes plagiarism and will be treated as such.** This is true even if you edit the text generated by the AI to change the phrasing.

Some other things to note:

- Use of chatbots is **detectable**. There are telltale signs that a text has been written by AI, and algorithms that can detect whether a body of text has been generated by a chatbot.
- The essays generated by chatbots **aren’t very good**. Even if you don’t get caught, you may get a passing grade, but you certainly won’t get a good one.
- You might wonder, “Can I use ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas, if I don’t copy the text for my paper?” If you use a chatbot in any way while writing your essay, **you must cite it and attach a copy of the chatbot text you used to your paper.** This is just as with

any other source you use in your paper. If you do that, you won't be plagiarizing – though your work will be much less original, and I doubt it will be improved.

- Most importantly, using a chatbot, as with any other form of cheating, **defeats the whole point of getting an education.** You are investing time and money in university in order to learn, and if you don't do the assignments yourself, you won't learn. So if you're tempted to cheat, ask yourself, "Why am I taking this course at all, if I don't want to learn?"

Accessibility and accommodation

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility, and students with disabilities and other diverse learning needs are welcome in this course. If you require accommodation for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about this course, please contact either me or Accessibility Services as soon as possible (accessibility.services@utoronto.ca; 416-978-8060). For more information on accessibility at U of T, go to <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>

RESOURCES

Want help? Here are some people you can ask:

- (1) **Me.** I am here to help you learn, and want to see you succeed. So please don't hesitate to ask me for help! I am always happy to meet with you to talk about anything you are struggling with (or excited about!) in the course.
- (2) **The Philosophy Essay Clinic.** You can get one-on-one help on your philosophy papers at the Philosophy Essay Clinic: <http://philosophy.utoronto.ca/st-george/undergraduate-at-st-george/philosophy-essay-clinic/>. The essay clinic is a great place to get feedback on rough drafts of your papers. The clinic is also popular, however, so book a slot early!
- (3) **Your college's Writing Centre.** Each college has a writing centre where students from that college can go for help with their writing assignments. To find your college's writing centre, go here: <http://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science/>
- (4) **Writing Plus workshops.** U of T's writing center holds a series of workshops throughout the term on every aspect of academic writing: see <https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-plus/winter-workshops/>. You can also find lots of writing advice on the center's website: <http://writing.utoronto.ca/>
- (5) **ELL (English Language Learning).** If English is not your first language, or if you want to improve your English language skills for any reason, there are helpful resources available at <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>.

University of Toronto also offers support services for a wide range of challenges you might encounter, including (but not limited to) mental health, financial distress, housing crises, and sexual violence. **If you need help, please ask for it.** There are people whose job it is to give you help. For a guide to these resources, visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/feeling-distressed>

Finally, for a fun and helpful guide to reading and writing philosophy, I highly recommend “The Pink Guide to Taking Philosophy Classes” by Professor Helena de Bres:
<https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/>

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

To keep the readings manageable in length, I’ve divided them into fine-grained sections. So, pay close attention to the pages listed below! Note that sometimes I list sections to read, but other times I list sections to **skip** – in the latter case, read everything but the skipped sections.

All readings are under 40 pages per class.

Part 1: Well-being

Wednesday 1/11: Introduction

Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, Ch. 2.2, “Well-Being” (p. 29-41)

Wednesday 1/18: Hedonism

Ben Bramble, “The Experience Machine”, sections 1-3 (p. 136-142)

Willem van der Deijl, “The Sentience Argument for Experientialism about Welfare”, **skip** sections 2 (p. 189-191), 5 and 6 (p. 205-206)

Gwen Bradford, “Consciousness and Welfare Subjectivity”, sections 1-4 (p. 1-9)

Wednesday 1/25: Desire-satisfaction theories

Chris Heathwood, “Desire-Fulfillment Theory”, whole article

Connie Rosati, “Internalism and the Good for a Person”, p. 297-299 (up to end of page), p. 307 (start at second to last paragraph, “The stronger form of internalism...”) – p. 324 (end at ‘Conclusion’).

Dale Dorsey, “Why Should Welfare ‘Fit?’”, section III.3 (p. 695-700)

Wednesday 2/1: Objective list, hybrid, and perfectionist theories

Guy Fletcher, “Objective List Theories”, whole article

Christopher Woodard, “Hybrid Theories,” p. 163 (from “However, there is a different kind of worry...”) – p. 169 (end of section)

Gwen Bradford, “Perfectionism”, **skip** final section, “Perfectionism and Political Theory” (p. 133-134)

Part 2: Value

Wednesday 2/8: ‘Good’ and ‘good for’: which comes first?

Richard Kraut, *Against Absolute Goodness*, chapters 8, 9, and 14

Tom Hurka, “Against ‘Good-For’/‘Well-Being’, for ‘Simply Good’”

Wednesday 2/15: The fitting-attitude theory of value

Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, p. 95-100 (up to “The Shadow of Hedonism”)

Michael Zimmerman, “Value and Normativity”, section 1.3 (p. 21-25)

Jan Gertken and Benjamin Kiesewetter, “The Right and the Wrong Kind of Reasons”, section 1 (p. 2-4)

Miles Tucker, “Moore, Brentano, and Scanlon: A Defense of Indefinability”, sections 2 and 3 (p. 2264-2269)

Wednesday 3/1: The bearers of value

[FIRST PAPER DUE]

Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, p. 19-20 (first full paragraph of 19 up to last full paragraph of 20) and p. 26-27 (start at 2.3, end at last full paragraph of 27)

Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, “A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for its Own Sake”, p. 44-48 (first full paragraph of 44 up to first paragraph of 48, “...in this sense of being ‘ultimate’.”)

Ben Bradley, “Two Concepts of Intrinsic Value”, whole article

Wednesday 3/8: Love and the value of persons

David Velleman, “Beyond Price”, **skip** last paragraph of p. 193 (“Surely, though...”) to second paragraph of 195 (“...in the rest of this article.”), last paragraph of 201 (“A further similarity...”) to first paragraph of 203 (“...as having a heart.”), and last paragraph of 206 (“Because respect and love...”) to second paragraph of 210 (“...of importance to his good.”)

Nandi Theunissen, “Explaining the Value of Human Beings”, p. 226, first paragraph (up to “...positive proposal.”), p. 227-228 (from final paragraph of 227 up to final paragraph of 228, “...the very essence of value.”), and sections 2 and 3 (p. 231-237).

Part 3: Meaning in life

Wednesday 3/15: Meaning in life

Susan Wolf, “Meaning in Life and Why it Matters”, lecture 1 (p. 2-18)

Antti Kauppinen, “Meaningfulness and Time”, **skip** sections 1 (p. 347-352) and 5 (p. 369-377)

Wednesday 3/22: Meaning and goal pursuit

Kieran Setiya, “The Midlife Crisis”, skip p. 5, right half (“It is in this context...”) to p. 10, end of section 1

Antti Kauppinen, “Against Seizing the Day”, section 1.3 (p. 96-98)

Joshua Glasgow, “The Ordinary Meaningful Life”, **skip** p. 5, start of “Meaningful Lives” section, to end of p. 8

Wednesday 3/29: The value of achievement

Gwen Bradford, “The Value of Achievements”, **skip** p. 213, fourth paragraph (“Fair enough...”) to 214, fourth paragraph (“...namely, intrinsic.”) and p. 215, third paragraph (“Delineating exactly...”) to 218, first paragraph (“...as relevant for perfection.”)

Brendan de Kenessey, “Activity Over Achievement” (if it’s ready!)

Wednesday 4/5: Cosmic insignificance and mortality

[FINAL PAPER DUE]

Guy Kahane, “Our Cosmic Insignificance”, **skip** “Insignificance and Metaethics” (p. 747-748)

Christopher Frugé, “Permanent Value”, whole article