Philosophy of Well-Being

Instructor: Dr Guy Fletcher
Class: Tuesday 2–4, DSB 1.17
Office Hour: Tuesday 1–2, office 4.03
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General
This course will examine well-being, a central issue in practical philosophy. It has two parts:

Part 1: In this part we examine the main theories of well-being. These include hedonism, desire-fulfilment theory, objective-list theory, perfectionism. We will also look at some more recent views, including hybrid theories.

Part 2: In this part we examine some general theoretical issues connected to well-being. We will look at whether well-being is holistic by examining whether lifetime well-being is some simple function from momentary well-being (the ‘shape of a life’ debate). We will also examine how time and death connect to well-being, by looking at issues such as the timing of prudential goods, whether (and why) death is bad for us, and whether posthumous events can impact well-being (and, if so, how).

Course Aims and Objectives
The aims of the course are:

1. To further development of core philosophical skills in philosophy: interpreting authors, reconstructing and evaluating arguments, articulating theories, etc
2. To provide knowledge of the main theories of well-being, and their strengths and weakness.
3. To enhance students’ ability to write an essay on the theory of well-being which displays critical assessment along with knowledge of the literature.
4. To develop students’ understanding of some of the main philosophical debates and practical issues which the theory of well-being has implications for
5. To give students confidence to give a short presentation with the help of clear visual aids

Assessment
Undergraduates
[except those taking this course by long essay/coursework dissertation. Please talk to me early in the course if you’re thinking of taking the course in this way.]

(1) Essay 3,000 words (worth 80%)
(2) Participation (worth 20%)
MSc Students

(1) Essay 3,000 words (worth 80%)
(2) Participation (worth 20%).

The participation assessment will take the form of
- two short in-class quizzes (each worth 5%)
- a presentation (either individual or small group, depending on numbers), worth 10%.

For the relevant deadlines and guidelines please see the Assessment tab on the LEARN page.

In Class Quizzes
- Will take place at the beginning of the class in week 3 (assessing material from weeks 1 & 2) and in week 10 (assessing material from weeks 7-9).
- Will consist of short response questions (1-2 paragraphs) and multiple-choice questions.

Presentation
- You will prepare some kind of presentation based on the content of the course. The deadline for this will be advertised on LEARN.
- You must submit your presentation (either hard copy, if appropriate, or electronic copy by email) to the relevant teaching office (i.e. undergraduate or postgraduate).

You should come to see me in my office hour to discuss your presentation before getting started on it.

Your task is as follows:

*Explain, analyse and evaluate some theory, idea, argument, or objection from the course (in any format other than a written essay).*

You will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- How clearly and accurately you explain the relevant (e.g.) theory
- How accurately you analyse and how well you evaluate it.

As to the *form* of your presentation, the following kinds of presentations are possible:

(1) Making a simple website (using e.g. weebly)
(2) Making a powerpoint (prezi, etc) presentation
(3) Recording a video (10 minutes)
(4) Giving an in-class presentation (10 minutes) with handout
(5) Making a poster
If you have a different idea, that’s great, just make sure to run it by me first.

**Class Readings and Topics**

Listed below are the readings and topics for each seminar. I will make some available on LEARN. For further additional readings please consult the bibliographies of the papers we read.

1. Intro & Hedonism

   **Further Reading**

2. Desire theories

   **Further Reading**

3. Objective List Theories

   **Further Reading**

4. Perfectionism

   **Further Reading**
Well-being.

5. Hybrid Theories
- Fletcher, G. (2016) *The Philosophy of Well-Being: An Introduction* (Chapter 6)

Further Reading

6. Innovative Learning Week [No Class]

7. Internalism

Further Reading

8. Shape of a life

Further Reading

9. Harm

Further Reading
10. Disability

Further Reading

11. Death and Posthumous Harm
One from (a) & (b) AND one from (c) & (d).

Class Format
It’s imperative that you only come to class (a) having done the reading and (b) prepared to contribute to discussion on it. The issues under consideration are of crucial importance and you all have interesting points to make. Think about what your view is and come to class ready to discuss it. Make sure to bring with you (a) the reading (b) your notes (c) some questions and thoughts on the reading.

FAQ
Note: I include here the answers to the most common queries. Email is a wonderful resource but (a) we are all overwhelmed by it because we don’t take the time to use other available resources and (b) it is an inefficient method for me to communicate with you all as a group. For these reasons I won’t reply to emails that ask a question clearly answered within this document or within the course material on the LEARN page. You are absolutely free to email me with any other question (or, preferably, ask me in class so that I can give the answer to others at the same time).

(1) Will you look at a draft of my essay?
I am happy to look at a draft as long as it reaches me by exactly 8 weeks before the relevant
deadline (this ensures that I have time to look at them and that you have time to make
changes in light of my comments).

(2) I missed a class, can you send me a summary of what was covered?
No. Make sure you are familiar with the reading that week.

(3) How do I go about finding extra readings?
Read the prescribed texts and the further reading suggestions listed above. Then read the
things cited within those. And so on.

(4) How many references do I need for my essay?
There’s no fixed number. And it’s better not to think in that way (that there is some number
of references you need to include). When deciding whether to reference something the only
relevant question is whether discussing this person’s view / objection etc contributes
positively to your answering the question. If it doesn’t, then leave it out.

(5) How should I reference?
I don’t mind which convention you use. Just make sure you use some convention and apply
it consistently. For more information see, for example:

http://www.docs.is.ed.ac.uk/docs/Libraries/PDF/SEcitingreferencesHarvard.pdf

(6) I need an extension / I have extenuating circumstances
You must talk to the teaching office and the student support officers.