

# Human Well-Being and Sustainability

SOS 591/ PHI 591/ HPS 591 + SOS 494

Fall 2020

Meeting Time: Mondays, from 4:30-7:15 PM

Location: WGHL-115 and Zoom (ASU Sync) <https://asu.zoom.us/j/4503530048>

## **Instructor**

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## **Course Description**

Many of us take it for granted that human well-being is the ultimate end of sustainability or sustainable development. But what *is* a well-being, really? Social scientists collect empirical data, develop indices, indicators, and other proxies to represent and measure well-being but is it the kind of phenomenon that can be explained? In other words, is there a correct theory of human well-being? How does one measure well-being? Moreover, what are we to make of the relationship between well-being and sustainability? Where do these two concepts coincide? Where do they come apart? Does human well-being presuppose a commitment to sustainability? If the ultimate end of sustainability is human well-being, then is sustainability a redundant concept? This interdisciplinary course will tackle such questions by critically examining the most prominent philosophical theories of well-being and by considering how they might be reconciled with some of the available empirical evidence. We will also spend considerable time reflecting on the problems that arise with respect to measuring well-being, particularly in the context of public policy.

## **Course Reading Materials**

With the exceptions of Anna Alexandrova's book, [\*A Philosophy for the Science of Well-Being\*](#) and Michel Bishop's book, [\*The Good Life: Unifying the Philosophy and Psychology of Well-Being\*](#), which may be purchased online, all of the reading material for this course will be made available on Canvas.

## Evaluation

Leading discussions, participation & attendance:	10%
Two 1000-word summaries ( <b>due October 5 &amp; November 2</b> ):	20%
Draft Essay ( <b>due November 16</b> ):	10%
Presentations ( <b>November 30</b> ):	20%
<u>Final Essay (<b>due November 30</b>):</u>	<u>40%</u>
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>

### *Leading discussions, participation & attendance*

Students will be required to lead discussions during the semester. Each week, the student(s) in charge will summarize the readings, explain them to the class, and present a few questions to initiate a discussion. **Although attendance will not be taken, it is strongly encouraged.** If something comes up and you cannot attend class, then please let me know in advance. It will be very difficult to do well in this course without doing the weekly readings, attending class, and actively participating in the classroom discussions.

### *Two 1000-word summaries*

Students are to summarize two course readings – of their choice – and submit them for credit. These documents are to be highly polished summaries and should be submitted on **October 5 and November 2**. Submitting your summaries on time is strongly encouraged since this will give you more time to focus on developing your essay. These “summaries” can be descriptive, exegetical, or students may choose to use them as a forum to develop and argue for a specific thesis.

### *Individual or Group Presentation*

The final class of this course will be reserved for student presentations. You may elect to either present on your own or in a group (two students at most). More information will be given as the semester progresses. As always, please contact the instructor by e-mail if you have any questions.

### *Draft and Final essay*

Your final essay must be well written, and this will almost certainly require writing several drafts. Please submit your best draft to me by **November 16**. Submitting your draft by this date will give me enough time to provide feedback so that you can revise your essay before submitting the final version. Your essay must develop an argument. Even if you find yourself in almost complete agreement with one scholar, try with as much integrity as possible to sound out the alternative points of view. You may find that in the process that they will also have some merit. The sharper your own line of argument, the stronger will be your final essay. You will be graded on the clarity and soundness of your argument and on your command of the material. You will also be graded on the organization of your final paper, its content and style. **The final essay is due November 30.**

## Course Calendar

### August

#### *Part I: Introduction to Sustainability and Philosophical Theories of Human Well-Being*

- 24 Introduction: What is Sustainability?
- 31 Hedonism

### September

#### **7 Labor Day (No class)**

- 14 Preference/Desire Satisfactionism
- 21 Eudaimonia and Objective List Theories

#### *Part II: Measurement and Empirical Evidence*

- 28 Human Well-Being: Measurement

### October

- 5 Human Well-Being: Empirical Evidence (**1000-word summary is due**)

#### *Part III: A Philosophy for the Science of Well-Being*, by A. Alexandrova

- 12 Alexandrova's *A Philosophy for the Science of Well-Being* (Chapters 1-3)
- 19 Alexandrova's *A Philosophy for the Science of Well-Being* (Chapters 4-6)

#### *Part IV: The Good Life: Unifying the Philosophy and Psychology of Well-Being*, by M. Bishop

- 26 Bishop's *The Good Life* (Chapters 1-4)

### November

- 2 Bishop's *The Good Life* (Chapters 4-8) (**1000-word summary is due**)

#### *Part V: Sustainability, Well-Being, and Consumption*

- 9 What is Consumption?
- 16 Sustainability, Human Well-Being, and Consumption (**draft essay is due**)

#### *Part VI: Well-Being and Public Policy*

- 23 Well-Being Theory and Public Policy
- 30 Student Presentations (**final essay is due**)

## Weekly Reading Assignments

### *Part I: Introduction to Sustainability and Philosophical Theories of Human Well-Being*

1. **Introduction: What is Sustainability? – August 24**
  - a. *Sustainability: A History*, by J. Caradonna (Chapter 1, Introduction)
  - b. “Norton and Sustainability as Such,” by P.B. Thompson (Chapter 2, *A Sustainable Philosophy – The Work of Bryan Norton*, eds., S. Sarkar and B. Minter)
  - c. “Sustainability,” by J. O’Neill (Chapter 29, *The Routledge Handbook of Global Ethics*, eds. D. Moellendorf and H. Widdows)
  
2. **Hedonism – August 31**
  - a. *Utilitarianism*, by J.S. Mill (excerpts)
  - b. *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, by R. Nozick (p.42-5)
  - c. *Pleasure and the Good Life*, by F. Feldman (Chapters 2 and 3)
  - d. “Hedonism Reconsidered,” by R. Crisp

### **Labor Day – NO CLASS – September 7**

3. **Preference/Desire Satisfactionism – September 14**
  - a. “Desire-Fulfillment Theory,” by C. Heathwood
  - b. *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy and Public Policy*, by D. Hausman and M. McPherson (Chapter 8)
  - c. “Preference Satisfaction and Welfare Economics,” by D. Hausman and M. McPherson
  - d. “Which Desires are Relevant to Well-Being?,” by C. Heathwood
  
4. **Eudaimonia and Objective List Theories– September 21**
  - a. “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,” by T. Nagel
  - b. “On Aristotle’s Natural Limit,” by C.T. DesRoches
  - c. “A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being,” by G. Fletcher

### *Part II: Measurement and Empirical Evidence*

5. **Human Well-Being: Measurement – September 28**
  - a. *Subjective Well-Being: Measuring Happiness, Suffering, and Other Dimensions of Experience*, National Research Council (Chapters 1 & 2)
  - b. “Are Subjective Measures of Well-Being ‘Direct?’” by E. Angner
  - c. “Measuring Subjective Well-Being,” by R. Layard
  - d. “Developments in the Measurement of Subjective Well-Being,” by D. Kahneman & A.B. Krueger
  
6. **Human Well-Being: Empirical Evidence – October 5**
  - a. “Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence,” By R. Easterlin
  - b. “Hedonic Adaptation,” by S. Frederick and G. Loewenstein
  - c. “High Fidelity Economics,” by A. Alexandrova and D.M. Haybron
  - d. “Beyond Money: Toward an Economy of Well-Being,” by E. Diener and M. Seligman

- e. “Findings all Psychologists Should Know from the New Science on Subjective Well-Being,” by E. Diener *et al.*

*Part III: A Philosophy for the Science of Well-Being*, by A. Alexandrova

Chapters 1-3 – **October 12**

Chapters 4-6 – **October 19**

*Part IV: The Good Life: Unifying the Philosophy and Psychology of Well-Being*, by M. Bishop

Chapters 1-3 – **October 26**

Chapters 4-6 – **November 2**

*Part V: Sustainability, Well-Being, and Consumption*

**What is Consumption? – November 9**

- a. “Varieties of Overconsumption,” by D. Schmidtz and E. Willott
- b. “Are We Consuming Too Much?,” K. Arrow *et al.*
- c. “Are We Consuming Too Much – for What?,” H.E. Daly *et al.*
- d. “The Frame of Reference as a Public Good,” by R.H. Frank

**Sustainability, Well-Being, and Consumption – November 16**

- a. “Towards a Sustainable Flourishing: Democracy, Hedonism and the Politics of Prosperity,” by K. Soper
- b. “Citizenship, Well-Being and Sustainability: Epicurus or Aristotle?” by J. O’Neill.
- c. “Consumption and Well-Being,” by P. Knights and J. O’Neill
- d. “The Virtue of Simplicity,” by J.C. Gambrel and P. Cafaro
- e. “Downshifting and Meaning in Life,” by N. Levy

*Part VI: Well-Being & Public Policy*

**Well-Being Theory & Public Policy – November 23**

- a. “Hedonism and Welfare Economics,” by D. Hausman
- b. “Can an Evidential Account Justify Relying on Preferences for Well-Being Policy?,” by G. Hersch
- c. “Well-Being Policy: What Standard of Well-Being?,” by D. Haybron & V. Tiberius“
- d. “No Theory-Free Lunches in Well-Being Policy,” by G. Hersch

**Student Presentations – November 30**