

SOS 394/PHI 394

Philosophy of Human Well-Being and Sustainability

Fall 2018
Tuesdays 4:30-7:15 PM
LL 103
ASU Tempe Campus
Instructor: Dr. Tyler DesRoches
Office Hours: By appointment
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Course Description

Among philosophers and economists, sustainability generally entails maintaining human well-being for present and future generations. Yet, there is no consensus on what *makes* a human life good. This interdisciplinary course will introduce students to various philosophical theories of well-being from both Western and Eastern traditions, including hedonism, objective-list theories, perfectionism, desire satisfactionism, Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Through lectures, student-led discussion, and readings in philosophy, positive psychology, and happiness economics, students will scrutinize the relation between human well-being, consumption, and sustainability. While it is often claimed that sustainability requires a reduction in consumption among members of the present generation, and that such reductions have negative welfare effects for those who consume less, this course considers the possibility of sustainability without sacrifice – that some reductions in consumption may have either neutral or beneficial effects for those who reduce their consumption.

This course consists of three distinct phases. During *Phase I*, students will develop their own pre-theoretical self-conception of well-being and consider its relation to both consumption and sustainability. During *Phase II*, which is the longest phase, students will learn about the many competing theories of well-being and its relation to consumption (and the factors that determine the possibility of consumption, such as income and wealth). Finally, during *Phase III*, students will develop an *informed* self-conception of well-being and a consumption plan specified over some period of time, which could be the whole of one's life. At the end of this last phase, students will have the opportunity to present their own informed self-conception of well-being, consumption plans, and strategies to implement these plans.

Reading Materials

Aside from Michael Puett and Christine Gross-Loh's (2016) *The Path: What Chinese Philosophers can Teach Us about the Good Life*, which can be purchased online (<https://www.amazon.com/Path-Chinese-Philosophers-Teach-About/dp/1476777845>), the assigned readings for this course will be available on Canvas. Students are expected to do all of the readings as these materials will serve as the basis for assignments, class discussion, and lectures.

Course withdrawal Deadline

The course withdrawal deadline for this course is October 31, 2018.

Technical Support Contact Information

If you are experiencing technical issues, contact the ASU Help Desk using the following information: Email: helpdesk@asu.edu, Phone: 480-965-6500, option 1. For information on systems outages see the ASU systems status calendar, please visit <http://syshealth.asu.edu/>.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

ASU's Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the entity that provides services to students with disabilities. If you desire accommodation for this course, contact DRC at <http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc> to establish your eligibility and make sure they can provide you with the services you will need for this course. Students with disabilities must meet the same standards, deadlines, etc. as any other student enrolled in this course.

Academic Integrity

Students must avoid committing acts of academic dishonesty and they are encouraged to discourage others from committing such acts as well. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following examples: engaging in any form of academic deceit; referring to materials, sources, or devices (e.g., computer disks, audio recorders, camera phones, text messages, crib sheets, calculators, solution manuals, materials from previous classes, or commercial research services) not authorized by the instructor for use during any academic evaluation or assignment; providing inappropriate aid to another person in connection with any academic evaluation or assignment; engaging in Plagiarism; using materials from the Internet or any other source without full and appropriate attribution; claiming credit for or submits work done by another; signing an attendance sheet for another student, allowing another student to sign on one's own behalf another without actually attending; falsifying or misrepresenting hours or activities in relationship to an internship, externship, field experience, workshop or service learning experience; or attempting to influence or change any academic evaluation, assignment or academic record for reasons having no relevance to academic merit.

ASU expects and requires all its students to act with honesty and integrity, and respect the rights of others in carrying out all academic assignments. For more information on academic integrity, including the policy and appeal procedures, please visit <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>.

Sexual Violence Prevention

Title IX is a federal law that provides that no person be excluded on the basis of sex from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. Both Title IX and university policy make clear that sexual violence and harassment based on sex is prohibited. An individual who believes they have been subjected to sexual violence or harassed on the basis of sex can seek support, including counseling and academic support, from the university. If you or someone you know has been harassed on the basis of sex or sexually assaulted, you can find information and resources at <https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/faqs>.

As a mandated reporter, the instructor of this course is obligated to report any information he becomes aware of regarding alleged acts of sexual discrimination, including sexual violence and dating violence. ASU Counseling Services, <https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling>, is available if students wish discuss any concerns confidentially and privately.

Syllabus Disclaimer

The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus.

Attendance and Participation

You will receive points for attending class and attendance is strongly encouraged. If you have a good reason for missing class, then please let me know at least one day in advance via e-mail. It will be very difficult for students to do well in this course without attending every class, and actively participating in the classroom discussions.

Assignments

Attendance and Participation	10%
Pre-theoretical self-conception of well-being (500 words), due August 28	5%
10 responses to readings (100 words each), for due dates, see below	20%
Abstract for Final Paper (1,000 words), due October 30	10%
Informed self-conception of well-being (1,500 words), due November 20	10%
Presentation, due November 27	15%
Final Paper (12 pages, double-spaced), due November 30	30%

- **Pre-theoretical self-conception of well-being**

Your first assignment is to develop a pre-theoretical self-conception of human well-being. This self-conception will be your own personal view of what constitutes a good human life after some reflection – but prior to studying the various theories of human well-being covered by this course. Your self-conception of well-being should be designed to withstand reasonable scrutiny. This assignment is intended to give students an opportunity to reflect on the basic question – what makes a good human life good? – before learning how other prominent theorists have answered this question in the past. Students are also encouraged to reflect on how their pre-theoretical self-conception of well-being relates to their own consumptive behavior and sustainability.

- **Responses (10)**

Most weeks, students will be required to submit a 100-word response to one of the weekly readings. These responses should analyze a specific issue, topic, or argument found in a particular reading. All submitted responses should be well-written, polished, and without grammatical error.

- **Abstract for Final Paper**

Well-written abstracts captivate readers. Your abstract should not only describe the topic of your final paper and make a compelling case for your thesis, but it should also engage, persuade, and excite the reader. Because your abstract should include at least five reputable peer-reviewed academic books or articles, this assignment requires that students do some

preliminary research. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with the instructor to discuss their abstract and plans for writing the final paper.

- **Informed self-conception of well-being**

In contrast to the *pre-theoretical* self-conception of well-being described above, this assignment requires that students develop their own *informed* self-conception of well-being. What is your view of a good human life after learning about the various competing theories of human well-being and how does this informed self-conception of well-being relate to consumption and sustainability? For this assignment, you should develop a consumption plan – a pattern of consumption – over some period of time, which could be your lifetime, and explain how it relates to your informed self-conception of well-being.

- **Presentation**

The final class of this course will be reserved for student presentations. You may wish to either present on your informed self-conception of well-being or your final paper. More information will be given as the semester progresses. As always, please contact the instructor by e-mail if you have any questions.

- **Final Paper**

Your final research paper must be well written, and this will almost certainly require writing several drafts. Your paper must develop an argument. Even if you find yourself in almost complete agreement with one scholar in the literature, try with as much integrity as possible to sound out the alternative points of view. You may find that, in the process, opposing views also have some merit. The sharper your own line of argument, the stronger will be your final paper. 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 paper, its content, and style.

Course Calendar

AUGUST

21 – Introduction to the course

Reasons and Persons, Appendix I “What Makes Someone's Life Go Best?” By D. Parfit

28 – Sustainability, well-being and consumption

“Consumption and Well-Being,” by P. Knights and J. O’Neill

“Economic Consumption, Pleasure, and the Good Life,” by P. Cafaro

Assignment due in class: Pre-theoretical self-conception of well-being

Assignment due in class: Response #1

SEPTEMBER

4 – Objective list theories

“Objective List Theories,” by G. Fletcher

“A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being,” by G. Fletcher

Assignment due in class: Response #2

11 – Perfectionism

Natural Goodness (Chapters 2 & 3), by P. Foot

Perfectionism (Chapter 2), by T. Hurka

Assignment due in class: Response #3

18 – Desire Satisfactionism

“Which Desires are Relevant to Well-Being?”, by C. Heathwood

Assignment due in class: Response #4

25 – Hedonism

Introduction to the Principles and Morals of Legislation (excerpts), by J. Bentham

Utilitarianism (excerpts), by J.S. Mill

Anarchy, State and Utopia (excerpts), by R. Nozick

Assignment due in class: Response #5

OCTOBER

2 – Hybrid theories

“Well-Being as Enjoying the Good,” by S. Kagan

Assignment due in class: Response #6

9 – No class (fall break)

16 – Confucianism & Daoism

The Path (Chapters 3, 4 & 5), by M. Puett and C. Gross-Loh

Assignment due in class: Response #7

23 – Christianity & Buddhism

The City of God (Book XIX), by Saint Augustine

“Buddhist Understandings of Well-Being,” by C.W. Gowans

Assignment due in class: Response #8

30 – Positive psychology: I

“Findings all Psychologists Should Know From the New Science on Subjective Well-Being,” by

E. Diener, S.J. Heintzelman, K. Kushlev, L. Tay, D. Wirtz, L.D. Lutes, & S. Oishi

Subjective Well-Being: Measuring Happiness, Suffering, and Other Dimensions of Experience,

(Chapters 1 & 2), by National Research Council of the National Academies

Assignment due in class: Paper Abstract

NOVEMBER

6 – Positive psychology: II

“Will Money Increase Subjective Well-Being?,” by E. Diener and R. Biswas-Diener

“Beyond Money: Toward an Economy of Well-Being,” by E. Diener and M. Seligman

Assignment due in class: Response #9

13 – Happiness Economics: I

“What can Economists Learn from Happiness Research?,” by B.S. Frey and A. Stutzer

“Economics and the Study of Individual Happiness,” by B.S. Frey and A. Stutzer

20 – Happiness Economics: II

“Do We Really Know What Makes us Happy? A Review of the Economic Literature on the Factors Associated with Subjective Well-Being,” by P. Dolan, T. Peasgood, & M. White.

“High Income Improves Evaluation of Life but Not Emotional Well-Being,” by D. Kahneman and A. Deaton

Assignment due in class: Response #10

Assignment due in class: Informed Self-Conception of Well-Being

27 – Student Presentations

No Readings

30 – Final Papers due by 4:00 PM. To be submitted in-person @ WGHL 358.

No Class