

Philosophy 267 Political Philosophy

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Seminar meets Mondays 4-7.

The idea of well-being and its political significance (if any).

This course examines recent philosophical proposals concerning the nature and content of individual well-being. The rough idea is that to inquire about a person's well-being is to inquire about how well someone's life is going for that very individual. Well-being is what an individual pursues effectively insofar as he or she is being prudent.

What's that? Happiness in the sense of feeling good? Happiness as emotional attunement? Satisfaction of one's rational aims? Desire or preference satisfaction? Informed desire satisfaction? Feeling satisfied about one's life as a whole or judging that one's life has met one's standards? Achieving what's objectively valuable? Development and exercise of one's rational capacities, or fulfillment of the nature of the kind of being one happens to be? All of these views have contemporary defenders.

Theorists differ not only on the nature of well-being but also on its importance. T.M. Scanlon doubts the notion should play much of a role from the first-person perspective, from the perspective of someone seeking to help another, or from the perspective of morality and social justice. Thomas Hurka following the lead of G.E. Moore has different but similarly deflationary views.

When it comes to morality and politics, for welfarist consequentialists, the idea of well-being looms large. According to welfarist consequentialists, what we ought morally always to do is maximize some function of individual well-being (maximize the aggregate total across persons, or maximize the average, or equalize, or something else). In a slogan, we ought to be bringing about good lives for people, with good fairly distributed across persons. A nonconsequentialist view that contains a significant beneficence requirement might also use the idea of individual well-being to specify what beneficence toward others requires of us.

But other views will balk at such ideas. Many political philosophers hold that it is not the proper business of a decent political state to be concerned for the ultimate well-being levels that individual citizens reach. Rather the just state maintains arrangements that bring about a fair distribution of resources, liberties, opportunities, capabilities, Rawlsian social primary goods, or the like. Given a fair distribution of resources against the background of a fair framework for individual interaction, whether individual members of society end up living happy or unhappy, fulfilled or unfulfilled lives is up to each of them not the concern of social justice. Here the idea that the state should be neutral among controversial conceptions of the good and ways of life comes to the fore. A strong doctrine of political liberalism, which holds that a morally legitimate state does not impose on members of society except in ways that are justifiable by principles acceptable to all reasonable individuals, and adds that principles that recommend promoting some controversial conceptions of good over others are one and all reasonably rejectable, imposes a similar constraint.

This course (1) examines competing views as to the nature of individual well-being, (2) explores some skeptical positions that doubt that a clarified concept of well-being would be of much use and denies that ethics needs a theory of well-being, and (3) considers the views of political theorists who reject the idea that what we owe to each other by way of social justice is rightly shaped by judgments about would make members of society better off or worse off in terms of well-being.

Course requirements: Attendance and participation at all seminar meetings, some seminar presentations (analyzing a key argument or claim in a reading and leading its discussion), and a term paper (about 15-20 pages in length) on some topic central to course themes. Regular auditors of the class are welcome, and will be asked to contribute seminar presentations. It is expected that seminar participants will read the

items marked ‘readings’ on the syllabus for each week. What are labeled “further readings” are not required, just recommended for those who want to delve further into some aspect of the week’s themes.

Course texts: These will be made available electronically and also sometimes in hard copy in the Philosophy Department Library.

Schedule of topics and readings.

More topics are listed than there are weeks in the quarter. It will be up to seminar participants to decide what topics we cover.

Week 1. Introduction and overview. Objective list views.

Reading Derek Parfit, “What Make Someone’s Life Go Best,” Appendix to Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 1984; also R. Arneson, “Does Fairness Require a Multidimensional Approach? (The bare objective list account defended).”

Further Reading: Guy Fletcher, “A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being,” *Utilitas* (2013).

Week 2. Desire satisfactionism.

Reading: Krister Bykvist, “Subjective Theories,” (forthcoming); Peter Railton, “Facts and Values,” *Philosophical Topics* (1986); Ben Bradley, chapter 1 of his *Well-Being and Death* (2009).

Further reading: James Griffin: *Well-Being, Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (1986); Connie Rosati, “Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good,” *Ethics* (1995); D. Dorsey, “Subjectivism without Desire,” *Philosophical Review* (2012); Daniel Hausman, *Preference, Value, Choice, and Welfare* (2012); Richard Kraut, *What Is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being* (2007), pp. 94-116; also Krister Bykvist, “Can Unstable Preferences Provide a Stable Standard of Well-Being?” *Economics & Philosophy* (2010).

Week 3. Hedonism.

Reading: Robert Nozick, “The experience machine” excerpt from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*; Roger Crisp, “Hedonism Reconsidered,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2006); Fred Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* (2010), chapters 6-10.

Further reading: Kraut, *What is Good and Why*, pp. 120-130; D. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, chapter 3, “Pleasure”; D. Kahneman, “Objective Happiness,” in Kahneman, et al, *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (1999); D. Kahneman and A. Krueger, “Developments in the Measurement of Subjective Well-Being,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (2006); George Loewenstein; “Because It Is There: The Challenge of Mountaineering for Utility Theory” 1999); George Loewenstein and Peter Ubel, “Hedonic adaptation and the role of decision and experience utility in public policy” (2008).

Week 4. Life satisfaction.

Reading: Wayne Sumner, chapters 2 and 6 from *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*, 1996. Highly recommended: Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, & Ethics*, chapters 4 (“Hedonism”) and 5 (“Desire Theory”); also Fred Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, chapter 5, “Whole Life Satisfaction Concepts of Happiness”; also Daniel Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, chapter 5, “Life Satisfaction.”

Further reading: B. Frey and A. Stutzer, *Happiness and Economics: How the Economy and Institutions Affect Human Well-Being* (2002); Daniel Kahneman and Jacob Riis, “Living and thinking about it: Two perspectives on life,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (2006).

Week 5. Happiness as an emotional condition; well-being is happiness so understood.

Reading: D. Haybron, “Happiness, the Self, and Human Flourishing,” *Utilitas* (2008).

AND

Week 5. Hybrid views. Nothing intrinsically enhances a person’s life unless it is (a) enjoyed and objectively worthwhile, or (b) objectively worthwhile and desired, or (c) enjoyed and desired, or (d) some other combination of these.

Reading: Shelly Kagan, “Well-Being as enjoying the Good,” *Philosophical Perspectives* (2009).

Further reading on hybrid views: : Robert Adams, “Well-Being and Excellence,” in Adams, *Finite and Infintet Goods* (1999); Richard Kraut, “Desire and the Human Good, *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA* (1994); S. Darwall, “Valuing Activity,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* (1999).

Further reading on well-being as happiness understood as an emotional condition: Daniel Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, chapters 6 & 7; Fred Feldman, *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?*, pp. 27-32.

Week 6. Perfectionism, Objective Theories of the Good.

Reading: Richard Kraut, *What Is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being*, excerpt from chapter 3, 131-153; Thomas Hurka, excerpts from *Perfectionism* (1993); D. Brink, "Mill's Deliberative Utilitarianism," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*; Hurka, "Value Theory" in D. Copp, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (2006); Hurka, "Objective theories: (forthcoming).

Further reading: D. Dorsey, "Three Arguments for Perfectionism" *Nous* (2010); D. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, chapter 8, "Well-Being and Virtue."

Further reading: The literature on ancient eudaimonism is immense. See Terence Irwin, *The development of Ethics*, vol. 1, chapters on Aristotle.

Week 7. Well-being and Politics. It's not the business of the state to be concerned with people's ultimate welfare; the state ought to be bringing it about that its members have fair shares of resources, liberties, capabilities, opportunities.

Reading: J. Rawls, "Social Unity and Primary Goods," in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (1982); T. M. Scanlon, "Well-Being," chapter 3 in his *What We Owe to Each Other* (1998); R. Dworkin, "Equality of Welfare," chapter 1 of his *Sovereign Virtue* (2000); Marc Fleurbaey, "The Importance of What People Care About," *Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* (2012).

Week 8. Neutrality on the Good.

Reading: G. Sher, chapters from *Beyond Neutrality* (1997); Joseph Raz, chapters from *The Morality of Freedom*; Alan Patten, "Liberal Neutrality: A Reinterpretation and Defense," *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2012).

Further reading: R. Arneson, "Liberal Neutrality on the Good: an Autopsy," in Steven Wall and George Klosko, eds., *Perfectionism and Neutrality* (2003). Steven Wall, "Neutralism for Perfectionists: The Case of Restricted State Neutrality"; Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, chapters on neutrality (1986).

Week 9. Political Liberalism and Neutrality on the Good.

Reading: Martha Nussbaum, "Political Liberalism and Perfectionist Liberalism," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (2012); Jonathan Quong, *Liberalism without Perfectionism*, chapters 3, 4, & 7.

Further reading: Steven Wall, "Perfectionism, Reasonableness, and Respect" (2013); Arneson, "Neutrality and Political Liberalism," in Roberti Merrill and Daniel Weinstock, eds., *Political Neutrality: A Re-Evaluation* (2014); Jonathan Quong, *Liberalism without perfection*, chapter 1.

Week 10. Well-Being and Time; the shape of a life.

Reading: David Velleman, "Well-Being and Time," in his *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (2005), Dale Dorsey, "The Shape of a Life," *Ethics* (2014); Ben Bradley, *Well-Being and Death*, sections 2.4 and 2.5, 4.5, and 5.1.

Further reading: Shelly Kagan, chapter on "The Value of Life" in his *Death*.