

PHIL 351: Well-Being and Happiness

Fall 2024

Location: PAHB 229

Time: TTh 11:30 am - 12:45pm

Instructor: Blake Francis

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University and Department Requirements Satisfied by this Course:

Distribution Requirement: Arts and Humanities (AH)

Functional Competency: Critical Analysis and Reasoning

Philosophy Major Requirements: This course satisfies an elective for the Philosophy Major

Philosophy Minor Requirements: This course covers an elective for the Philosophy Minor

Philosophy Certificate Requirements Satisfied by This Course: This course covers one of the Philosophy, Ethics, and Value Certificate electives.

Course Description and Rationale

Most of us want to live a good and meaningful life. We each want our lives to go well. But what exactly is it for something to be good for you? This question concerns well-being, which is a prudential value. The philosophical study of well-being considers what it is for something to be good or bad for a person. In the first part of the semester, we will learn and assess three competing theories of well-being:

- 1.1. Hedonism: What is good for someone is what makes them feel happiness or pleasure.
- 1.2. Desire-Fulfillment Theory: What is good for someone is what fulfills their informed desires.
- 1.3. The Capabilities Approach: What is good for someone is able to be or do (e.g., being in good health or able to engage civically).

In the first part of the semester, we will gain an understanding of the central features of each theory of well-being and compare their strengths and weaknesses.

The second part of the semester considers the role of happiness in debates over well-being. By the late 20th century, hedonism was largely a discredited view. However, recent work in the science of happiness and positive psychology indicates that there is a strong link between the mental state of happiness and living a meaningful life. This research has helped renew philosophers' interest in investigating happiness as a central feature of living a meaningful life. The second part of our class studies three recent theories of happiness:

- 2.1. Life-Satisfaction Theory: Happiness is defined in terms of how satisfied a person feels about their life as a whole

- 2.2. Emotional State Theory: A person's happiness is understood in terms of their emotional states, including their moods and dispositions.
- 2.3. Attitudinal Hedonism: A person is happy when their pleasurable attitudes outweigh their negative attitudes.

During our investigation of theories of well-being and happiness, several practical and theoretical issues will emerge. We will explore philosophical questions that arise when welfare economists understand well-being in terms of revealed preference. We will consider how well-being should be understood when prioritizing and assessing poverty eradication projects and international development. We will consider whether we really know how happy we are or what makes us happy. Theoretical questions emerge about whether assessing lifetime well-being or happiness is a matter of adding up well-being at each moment or assessing the person's life as a whole.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Describe some of the major issues, views, arguments, and debates in the philosophy of well-being and happiness, including the following:
 - different views about the nature of well-being and how they lead to competing understandings of what is good for a person, including hedonism, desire satisfaction, and the capabilities approach
 - arguments against major theories of well-being, including famous counterexamples: the experience machine, the grass counter, and sour grapes
 - problems with the "experience requirement" in theories of well-being and how this relates to the question of whether experiencing satisfaction is essential to well-being
 - debates over whether indicators of well-being are universal
 - issues with measuring well-being in the context of economic development
 - different views about the nature of happiness, a psychological state, including life satisfaction theory, emotional state theory, and attitudinal hedonism
 - the difference between classical or sensory hedonism and attitudinal hedonism
 - problems different theories of happiness face, including the problem of objectless moods and attitude scarcity
 - issues with measuring an individual's happiness over the course of their whole life
2. Summarize philosophical arguments in your own words
3. Critically analyze philosophical arguments, especially using counterexamples and case studies
4. Compose critical essays in class demonstrating the above topics and skills

Required Texts:

Each week, **approximately 30 pages of reading** is assigned for this course. Please read the material carefully to prepare for class. Through practice over the course of the semester, we will develop close reading skills.

We will regularly engage with four required texts in this class in addition to other readings I've put together in Library Reserves. Each of the required texts is available as an e-book through the library and is available in the Library Reserves folder on Blackboard. You may also wish to purchase hard copies.

Feldman, Fred. 2010. *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haybron, 2010, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nussbaum, Martha C. 2000. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sumner, L.W. 1996. *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Methods of Evaluation:

Assessment in this class will be based on participation, weekly "Philosophy Practice" assignments, and exams.

Participation:

Your **participation** grade includes both attendance and preparation. To be a full participant in our class, it is important that you arrive on time having read and reflected on the material assigned before each lecture. Also, keep in mind that material will be presented in class that is not in the readings. If you must be late or miss a class, ask another student for notes, and you are always encouraged to discuss course materials with me.

Attendance will be taken using Qwickly at the beginning of class. If you are late and miss attendance check-in, please see me after class. You are allowed 3 "freebie" absences, which you can use at your discretion. These absences won't count against your grade.

If you feel ill, please do not come to class. Be in touch, preferably before class, so that we can make arrangements for you to make up any coursework you missed.

Philosophy Practice Assignments:

Tourist: "Excuse me, how do you get to Carnegie Hall?"

New Yorker: "Practice, practice, practice."

Everyone knows that if you want to learn how to play a musical instrument, you have to practice. The same goes for thinking about well-being and happiness in a philosophical way. Over the

the semester, I will assign short assignments that ask you to respond to readings or prepare for exams. Philosophy Practices provide opportunities to practice and receive early feedback as you apply the skills of philosophy. Philosophy Practices will be assigned over Blackboard in various formats: journal entries, multiple choice, true/false, or short answer questions. They are not formally evaluated but graded based on effort and engagement.

In the weeks they are assigned, Philosophy Practices will be due **due Tuesday mornings at 9:00 am**. There are **10 Philosophy Practices** this semester. The Philosophy Practice with the lowest score will be dropped from the final grade. See Blackboard and the course schedule for details.

*[*credit: This assignment is adapted from Sam Asarnow]*

Exams:

The **four essay exams** are designed to give you the opportunity to write philosophically, summarize and criticize arguments, as well as to develop and defend your own position on an issue. For each exam, you will be provided with a study guide containing a list of questions. A portion of those questions will be on the exam verbatim. All in-class essay exams are closed book and closed note. There will be one take-home exam, which will be open book.

Note: *Generative AI (ChatGPT and other large language models) cannot be used for any aspect of this course. Assignments created using these technologies are easily detected and will not be accepted. Inappropriate student use of AI will be considered plagiarism and reported as academic dishonesty. Even if you don't get caught, generative AI will get in the way of your learning in this class. In this class, you will learn something distinctively human that cannot be replicated by AI: How to think for yourself.*

Grading:

This course will be graded on a 1,000 point scale.

1000 - 900	=A
899 - 800	=B
799 - 700	=C
699 - 600	=D
599 - 0	=F

Evaluation of Assignments:

Participation	= 100 points
Philosophy Practices	= 200 points
Exam 1	= 175 points
Exam 2	= 175 points
Exam 3	= 175 points
Exam 4	= 175 points
Total	= 1,000 points

Late Assignments:

If you have a valid excuse (serious illness, death in the family, etc.), you may notify me before the day of an in-class exam to schedule a makeup exam.

Late Philosophy Practices will not usually be accepted. These assignments are designed to facilitate learning in class and are time-sensitive.

Reading Assignment Schedule

All readings are available on Blackboard/Library Reserves.

Date	Topic	Reading/Assignment
Tu 8/29	Introduction	Syllabus
1. WELL-BEING		
Tu 9/3	Theories of Well-being	Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> , Appendix I What makes someone's life go best? 493-502 PhilPrac 1 due @ 9am
1.1 Classical Hedonism		
Th 9/5	Is Well-being Happiness?	(1) Sumner, <i>Welfare Happiness & Ethics</i> , Chapter 4 Hedonism §4.1 The Classical View, 83-92 (2) Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, 4 pages
Tu 9/10	The Experience Machine	(1) Nozick, <i>Anarchy State and Utopia</i> , The Experience Machine, 2 pages (2) Sumner, <i>Welfare Happiness & Ethics</i> , 4.2 Problems with the Classical View, Chapter 4 Hedonism §4.2 Problems with the Classical View 92-98 PhilPrac 2 due @ 9am
1.2 Desire Theory		
Th 9/12	Revealed Preference Theory	(1) Sumner, <i>Welfare Happiness & Ethics</i> , Chapter 5 The Desire Theory §5.1 Revealed Preference, 113-122 (2) Sen, Rational Fools, 326-329 Exam 1 Study Guide Distributed
Tu 9/17	Review	No New Readings
Th 9/19	In-class Exam 1	
Tu 9/24	Informed Desire Theory	Griffin, <i>Well-being</i> , §§1.4-2.6, pp. 11-26 PhilPrac 3 due @ 9am
Th 9/26	More on Informed Desire Theory	Sumner, <i>Welfare Happiness & Ethics</i> , Chapter 5 The Desire Theory §5.2 Informed Desire, 122-137
Tu 10/1	Adapted Preferences	Nussbaum, <i>Women and Human Development</i> , 111-114; 136-142 PhilPrac 4 due @ 9am
1.3 The Capabilities Approach		
Th 10/3	Quality of Life	Nussbaum, <i>Women and Human Development</i> , 60-70
Tu 10/8	The Central Human Capabilities	Nussbaum, <i>Women and Human Development</i> , 70-86 PhilPrac 5 due @ 9am
Th 10/10	Capabilities, Not Functioning	Nussbaum, <i>Women and Human Development</i> , 86-96; 101-110
Tu 10/15	Culture, Diversity, Paternalism	Nussbaum, <i>Women and Human Development</i> , 34-58

		Exam 2 Study Guide Distributed
Th 10/17	Review	No New Readings
Tu 10/22	In-class Exam 2	
	2. HAPPINESS	
Th 10/24	Theories of Happiness	Haybron, <i>Happiness: A Very Short Introduction</i> , 1-13
	2.1 The Life Satisfaction Theory	
Tu 10/29	Is Happiness Life Satisfaction	Sumner, <i>Welfare Happiness & Ethics</i> , Chapter 6 Welfare and Happiness § 6.1 Life Satisfaction, 140-156 PhilPrac 6 due @ 9am
Th 10/31	Authenticity and Well-being	Sumner, <i>Welfare Happiness & Ethics</i> , Chapter 6 Welfare and Happiness § 6.1 Life Satisfaction (cont.), 156-171
Tu 11/5	Against Life Satisfaction	Haybron, <i>The Pursuit of Unhappiness</i> , 79-91 PhilPrac 7 due @ 9am
Th 11/7	Whole Life Satisfaction	Feldman, <i>What is this Thing Called Happiness</i> , Chapter 5 Whole Life Satisfaction Conceptions of Happiness §§5.2-5.5, 72-90 Exam 3 Study Guide Distributed
Tu 11/12	Review	No Readings
Th 11/14	Take Home Exam 3	No Class
	2.2 Emotional State Theory	
Tu 11/19	Three Faces of Happiness	Haybron, <i>The Pursuit of Unhappiness</i> , 107-122 PhilPrac 8 due @ 9am
Th 11/21	Psychic Affirmation	Haybron, <i>The Pursuit of Unhappiness</i> , 125-138; 147-148
Tu 11/26	Shallow and Fragile Happiness	Feldman, <i>What is this Thing Called Happiness</i> , Chapter 2 Sensory Hedonism about Happiness §2.2 Haybron on Hedonism about Happiness, 27-32 PhilPrac 9 due @ 9am
Th 11/28	Happy Thanksgiving!	
	2.3 Attitudinal Hedonism	
Tu 12/3	Attitudinal Pleasure	Feldman, <i>What is this Thing Called Happiness</i> , Chapter 6 What is this Thing Called Happiness? §§6.2-6.3 109-118; §6.4 124-126 PhilPrac 10 due @ 9am
Th 12/5	Objectless Moods	Feldman, <i>What is this Thing Called Happiness</i> , Chapter 7 Attitudinal Hedonism about Happiness, §7.0-7.4; 137-150 Exam 4 Study Guide Distributed
Tu 12/10	Conclusions/Review	No readings
	Exam 4 in Final Exam Slot: Th 12/12 10:30am to 12:30	

University Policies and Resources:

UMBC Statement of Values for Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult the [UMBC Student Handbook](#), or the [Academic Integrity Website](#).

Accessibility and Disability Accommodations, Guidance and Resources

Accommodations for students with disabilities are provided for all students with a qualified disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA ADAAA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act who request and are eligible for accommodations. The Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) is the UMBC department designated to coordinate accommodations that creates equal access for students when barriers to participation exist in University courses, programs, or activities.

If you have a documented disability and need to request academic accommodations in your courses, please refer to the SDS website at sds.umbc.edu for registration information and office procedures.

SDS email: disAbility@umbc.edu

SDS phone: 410-455-2459

If you will be using SDS approved accommodations in this class, please contact the instructor to discuss implementation of the accommodations. During remote instruction requirements due to COVID, communication and flexibility will be essential for success.

Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, and Gender Based Violence and Discrimination

[UMBC Policy](#) in addition to federal and state law (to include Title IX) prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in University programs and activities. Any student who is impacted by sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, gender discrimination, pregnancy discrimination, gender-based harassment, or related retaliation should contact the University's Title IX Coordinator to make a report and/or access support and resources. The Title IX Coordinator can be reached at titleixcoordinator@umbc.edu or 410-455-1717.

You can access support and resources even if you do not want to take any further action. You will not be forced to file a formal complaint or police report. Please be aware that the University may take action on its own if essential to protect the safety of the community.

If you are interested in making a report, please use the [Online Reporting/Referral Form](#). Please note that, if you report anonymously, the University's ability to respond will be limited.

Notice that Faculty and Teaching Assistants are Responsible Employees with Mandatory Reporting Obligations

All faculty members and teaching assistants are considered Responsible Employees, per UMBC's Policy on [Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Harassment, and Gender Discrimination](#). Faculty and teaching assistants therefore required to report all known information regarding alleged conduct that may be a violation of the Policy to the Title IX Coordinator, even if a student discloses an experience that occurred before attending UMBC and/or an incident that only involves people not affiliated with UMBC. Reports are required regardless of the amount of detail provided and even in instances where support has already been offered or received.

While faculty members want to encourage you to share information related to your life experiences through discussion and written work, students should understand that faculty are required to report past and present sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, stalking, and gender discrimination that is shared with them to the Title IX Coordinator so that the University can inform students of their [rights, resources, and support](#). While you are encouraged to do so, you are not obligated to respond to outreach conducted as a result of a report to the Title IX Coordinator.

If you need to speak with someone in confidence, who does not have an obligation to report to the Title IX Coordinator, UMBC has a number of [Confidential Resources](#) available to support you:

[Retriever Integrated Health](#) (Main Campus): 410-455-2472; Monday – Friday 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.; For After-Hours Support, Call 988.

[Center for Counseling and Well-Being](#) (Shady Grove Campus): 301-738-6273; Monday-Thursday 10:00a.m. – 7:00 p.m. and Friday 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. (virtual) [Online Appointment Request Form](#)

Pastoral Counseling via [The Gathering Space for Spiritual Well-Being](#): 410-455-6795; i3b@umbc.edu; Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Other Resources

[Women's Center](#) (open to students of all genders): 410-455-2714; womenscenter@umbc.edu; Monday – Thursday 9:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. and Friday 10:00 a.m. – 4 p.m.

[Shady Grove Student Resources](#), [Maryland Resources](#), [National Resources](#).

Child Abuse and Neglect

Please note that Maryland law and [UMBC policy](#) require that faculty report all disclosures or suspicions of child abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services and/or the police even if the person who experienced the abuse or neglect is now over 18.

Pregnant & Parenting Students

UMBC's [Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination](#) expressly prohibits all forms of discrimination and harassment on the basis of sex, including pregnancy. Resources for pregnant, parenting and breastfeeding students are available through the University's Office of [Equity and Civil Rights](#). Pregnant and parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator to discuss plans and ensure ongoing access to their academic program with respect to a leave of

absence – returning following leave, or any other accommodation that may be needed related to pregnancy, childbirth, adoption, breastfeeding, and/or the early months of parenting.

In addition, students who are pregnant and have an impairment related to their pregnancy that qualifies as disability under the ADA may be entitled to accommodations through the [Office of Student Disability Services](#).

Religious Observances & Accommodations

UMBC [Policy](#) provides that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs, and that students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. It is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor of any intended absences or requested modifications for religious observances in advance, and as early as possible. For questions or guidance regarding religious observances and accommodations, please contact the Office of Equity and Civil Rights at ecr@umbc.edu.

Hate, Bias, Discrimination & Harassment

UMBC values safety, cultural and ethnic diversity, social responsibility, lifelong learning, equity, and civic engagement.

Consistent with these principles, [UMBC Policy](#) prohibits discrimination and harassment in its educational programs and activities or with respect to employment terms and conditions based on race, creed, color, religion, sex, gender, pregnancy, ancestry, age, gender identity or expression, national origin, veterans status, marital status, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, or genetic information.

Students (and faculty and staff) who experience discrimination, harassment, hate, or bias based upon a protected status or who have such matters reported to them should use the [online reporting/referral form](#) to report discrimination, hate, or bias incidents. You may report incidents that happen to you anonymously. Please note that, if you report anonymously, the University's ability to respond may be limited.

Retriever Essentials - Free Food & Essentials for the UMBC Community!

Retriever Essentials is a faculty, staff, and student-led partnership that promotes food access in the UMBC community. We offer FREE groceries, toiletries, baby items, and meal swipes, and have opportunities to engage and volunteer:

- Pick up items from our free store [The Essential Space](#) located in RAC 235.
- Receive [fresh food](#) every Thursday 2:15-2:45pm @ the Library.
- Pick up snacks and food from our [Free Corner Stores](#) at the Campus Police Station or Library.
- [Email us](#) if you need [free meal swipes](#).
- [Donate food!](#)
- [Volunteer!](#)