

PIU11011 | Topics in Philosophy 1A

Credits:	10 ECTS
Contact Hours:	22 Lectures, 5 hours of Tutorials
Pre-requisite:	N/A
Semester:	Michaelmas
Module Leader:	Dr Rachel Handley
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Module Outline:

There are two components to this module, both are taught by Dr Handley. The first component is Well-Being. The second component is Moral Thinking.

Component 1: Well-being

Lives can go well or poorly for their subjects. What makes this so? In this module, we will examine the main answers philosophers have given to this question. The course begins by looking at what it might mean for experiences to be pleasurable or painful to their subjects. Next, we'll turn to what role (if any) the pleasurable or painfulness of life contributes to how well that life goes for its subject.

Well-Being is about what makes life go well. For a plant's life to go well it needs enough sunlight and water, a good temperature etc. We are interested in what makes life go well (or worse) for human beings.

Key Ideas

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Something can be valuable intrinsically or instrumentally.

- Intrinsic value: when something is valuable for its own sake
- Instrumental value: when something is valuable as a means to something else.

- This component aims to explore what well-being is, and what is required for a life to be good.
- We'll look at different accounts of what is required for well-being.
- In other words, we'll try to figure out what a good life is.

Well-Being Reading List and Lecture Topics

Reading

Every lecture there is **one piece** of required reading, this is the **first** reading listed for each lecture. You are required to read this before the lecture. This will mean you can get the most out of the lecture. If you have any questions about the readings or the lectures, please don't hesitate to contact me. My email is: handleyr@tcd.ie

Sometimes there is more than one piece of reading listed. These aren't compulsory to read for each lecture, but you might find them helpful to understand the topic. It is particularly encouraged to read these if you choose this area for your essay or are preparing for the exam. You can find the reading list for each topic below.

A general helpful resource for this course is the **Stanford Encyclopaedia entry on Well-being**. You should read this at least once during the course. This can be found online here:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/well-being/>

Lecture 1 – Introduction

- What is well-being?
- Why do philosophers seem to hate being clear about their terminology?

Plato – Crito

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/crito.html>

Lecture 2 – Pleasure

- What is it that makes an experience a pleasurable one?
- What are attitudinal accounts of pleasure?
- What are phenomenological accounts of pleasure?

Chris Heathwood – The Reduction of Sensory Pleasure to Desire

<https://philpapers.org/rec/HEATRO>

Stanford Encyclopaedia Entry on Pleasure, particularly sections 2 and 3.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pleasure/>

Lecture 3 – Pleasure (Again!)

- Can there be a single feeling that covers all pleasurable experience?
- What's reflective blindness?
- Does it provide a good counter-example to attitudinal accounts?

Ben Bramble - The Distinctive Feeling Theory of Pleasure

<https://philpapers.org/rec/BRATDF>

Stuart Rachels – Is Unpleasantness Intrinsic to Unpleasant Experiences?

<https://philpapers.org/rec/RACIUJ>

Elizabeth Ventham – Reflective Blindness, Depression and Unpleasant Experiences

<https://philpapers.org/rec/VENRBD>

Lecture 4 – Hedonism

- What is hedonism?
- What makes hedonism about well-being different from other theories people call hedonism?

- Is hedonism “the philosophy of swine”?

Alex Gregory – Hedonism, in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*

Ben Bramble – A New Defence of Hedonism about Well-being

<https://philpapers.org/rec/BRAAND-3>

Lecture 5 – The Experience Machine

- What is the experience machine?
- Can we trust our intuitions about the example?
- Do our intuitions change when we consider other people?

Robert Nozick – The Experience Machine

<http://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil3160/Nozick1.pdf>

Sharon Hewitt – What Do Our Intuitions about the Experience Machine Really Tell Us About Hedonism?

<https://philpapers.org/rec/HEWWDO>

Jennifer Hawkins – The Experience Machine and the Experience Requirement, in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*

Lecture 6 – Desire-Fulfilment

- What is the desire-fulfilment theory?
- Can the desire-fulfilment theory adequately solve the experience machine problem?
- Do we really only want things that are good for us?

Chris Heathwood – Desire-fulfillment Theory, in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*

Lecture 7 – Subjectivism

- How does the subjectivism/objectivism divide relate to the other theories of well-being?
- Can we know whether our lives are going well?

- Is it patronising to disagree with other people about whether their lives are going well?

Jennifer Hawkins - The Subjective Intuition

<https://philpapers.org/rec/HAWTSI>

Lecture 8 – Virtues

- If I'm a morally good person, is that good for my well-being?
- If I think I'm happy, but I'm a bad person... am I mistaken?
- Is being a morally good person only instrumentally good for my well-being?

Anne Baril – Virtue and Well-being, in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*

Brad Hooker - Does Moral Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent

<https://philpapers.org/rec/HOODBV>

Lecture 9 – Achievements

- Are achievements intrinsically or instrumentally good for us?
- What about achievements that cause us a lot of pain?
- How do we compare the value of achievements with other values?

Gwen Bradford - The Value of Achievements

<https://philpapers.org/rec/BRATVO-9>

Lecture 10 – The Non-Identity Problem

- How do our ideas of well-being influence how we should act?
- Is there a problem when it comes to thinking about the well-being of people who don't exist?
- Can we harm future generations?

Molly Gardner – Well-Being and the Non-Identity Problem, in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*

Lecture 11 – Recap

- A recap of the main issues, claims, and arguments from the previous weeks.

Component 2 – Moral Thinking

What is it to think morally rather than practically? This module will introduce students to different ways of thinking about moral philosophy. We will explore what moral thinking is, feminist ethics, moral skepticism, what moral values are and which values are crucial to moral thinking, as well as some of the key moral theories. Some of the questions we'll explore in this module are:

- What is moral thinking?
 - How important is trust?
 - Should we be skeptical about moral theory?
 - What are our obligations to other people?
 - Is there a link between psychological breakdown and wicked actions?
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- For students to be able to critically evaluate feminist ethics, moral skepticism, and other major moral theories.

Lecture 1: Introduction

- What is moral thinking?
- Which moral concepts should we value?
- How skeptical should we be?
- How important are our moral intuitions?

Required reading: Shelly Kagan “Thinking About Cases”.

Lecture 2: Moral Skepticism

- What is moral skepticism?
- Does skepticism threaten morality?

Required reading: George Sher “But I could be wrong?”

Lecture 3: The Role of Feelings in Moral Theory

- “Is it quite alright to shake hands with murder in your heart?”

Required reading: Mary Midgley “The Objection To Systematic Humbug”

Lecture 4: What Is Value?

- What is to understand something as morally valuable?
- Are benefits to ourselves the only benefits that matter morally?
- Can a thing be good in itself?

Required reading: Susan “Wolf Good-For Nothings”

Lecture 5: Trust

- Is trust an important moral value?
- What are the roles of various moral values in different theories? For example, how does the promotion of happiness play a role in Utilitarian moral theory?

Required reading: Annette Baier “Trust and Anti-Trust”

Lecture 6: Feminist Ethics and Obligation

- Does morality require feelings?
- What role does the feeling of care play in relation to morality?

Required reading: Nell Noddings “The Ethics of Caring”

Lecture 7: Utilitarianism

- What are the foundations of a good account of morality?
- What are the advantages of Contractualism over Utilitarianism?
- Is Contractualism just a form of Utilitarianism?

Required reading: Scanlon “Contractualism and Utilitarianism”

Lecture 8: Kant and Hypothetical Imperatives

- What is the difference between Categorical Imperatives and Hypothetical Imperatives?
- Are moral judgements only Categorical?
- Do moral considerations necessarily give us reasons to act?

Required reading: Philippa Foot “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”

Lecture 9: Trade-Offs, Trolley Problems, and The Right Thing To Do

- Should the number of people effected by an action determine whether you should perform that action?
- What counts as morally relevant?

Required reading: John M. Taurek “Should The Numbers Count?”

Lecture 10: Virtue, Character, and Wickedness

- How does Plato link virtue to the psyche?
- Does being virtuous lead to happiness?
- Is being wicked a form of psychological breakdown?

Required reading: Julia Annas “Wickedness as Psychological Breakdown”

Lecture 11: Feminism and Skepticism

- What is feminist ethics?
- What is the role of skepticism in feminist approaches to ethics?
- What are the feminist objections to general or impartial ethical theories?

Required Reading: Margaret Urban Walker “Feminist Skepticism, Authority, and Transparency”

Learning Outcomes

Component 1, Well-Being

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

- Several theories of well beings
- The problems and solutions which are associated with each theory.
- Your own view on well-being.

Component 2, Moral Thinking

- To introduce students to a variety of views about moral thinking.
- To develop students critical and evaluative skills.
- To introduce students to the debates about moral values.
- To introduce students to feminist ethics and moral skepticism.
- For students to understand and be able to critically evaluate arguments and claims about what it is to think morally.
- For students to be able to engage with debates about moral values (what it is, which values are important and which are not).

Assessment

Essay

1 essay for each component.
Each essay is 1500 words max.

Exam

2 exam questions, answer 1 question for each component.