

## Syllabus

### Professor

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Office: Hellems 192  
Hours: W 11-2, and by appt.

### Course Description

Things go better for some people than they do for other people. Some people's lives are quite good; other lives are not worth living at all. In virtue of what are such things true? What makes a life a good or a bad life for the person living it? What must we get in life if things are to go well for us? What does welfare or well-being consist in? These are different ways of asking the philosophical question of welfare, which is the question we will be trying to answer in this course.

Hedonists think getting a good life is a matter of enjoying what you get, preferentists think it a matter of getting what you want, eudaimonists think it a matter of being happy, aim achievementists think it a matter of achieving your goals, while objective theories maintain that there are things that it is just good for you to get, whether or not you would enjoy them, want them, be made happy by them, or aim to get them. We will study most or all of these theories, with some emphasis on preferentist approaches.

The topic of welfare is not only interesting in its own right, it is of fundamental importance to moral philosophy. On any plausible moral theory, how an action or social policy affects the welfare of people is at least one relevant factor in determining whether the action ought to be done or the policy instituted.

### Readings

One book is required:

L.W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

It should be at the CU Bookstore. Two other books are recommended:

Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

Fred Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

We will be reading four chapters from each of these books, so you might want to own them. But I will make copies available to those who don't own the books. I did not order these at the bookstore; you might consider looking for used copies online.

We will read other contemporary book chapters and journal articles as well, which I will provide via a course website: <http://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/phil6100/>.

## Requirements

**Weekly Email:** Most weeks you will send me, by Sunday night at the latest, an email containing two things: (1) a question that you have about the week's readings, and (2) an argument that you have extracted from one of the week's readings. The argument you send me should (a) be formally valid, so that the premises obviously entail the conclusion, and (b) have premises that are easy to understand. You should be prepared, if asked, (i) to present your argument to the class, (ii) to explain the rationales behind the premises (i.e., the reason(s) the author would give for thinking they are true), and (iii) to say what you think of it (and why).

Over the course of the semester, you will need to send me eight such emails. Please make the subjects of your emails "6100 weekly email #1," "6100 weekly email #2," etc., up to #8. No attachments please: just use the body of the email. (Although be sure either to save your email frequently as you compose it, or to compose it in a word-processing program and then copy-and-paste it into the body of your email.)

I will reply to and comment on some of your weekly emails, but maybe not all of them.

**Paper:** One term paper is required, due at the end of term. Details:

**Length:** 6,000-8,000 words, or about 20-27 pages. Let me know in advance (i.e., before turning in the paper) if you think your paper should be shorter or longer than these word limits.

**Topic:** Something related to welfare, presumably related to one or more of our readings. Be sure to pick a topic that is circumscribed, so you can discuss it thoroughly, rather than giving a shallow discussion of a large topic.

**Proposal:** On Monday, November 28, a one-page paper proposal is due. You will bring them to class, and discuss your ideas with me and your classmates. You should also email them to me in advance, as Microsoft Word attachments. I welcome them anytime during the semester, but the deadline is Sunday night, November 27. If you show them me earlier than Sunday 11/27, there is a chance I will be able to give you some advanced feedback on your proposal.

**Due date:** Monday, December 12. Turning them in earlier is good, too.

**Submission:** By email, as a Microsoft Word attachment.

**Content:** Your papers should be written like professional journal articles. Accordingly, they should have these elements:

*Thesis:* Your thesis should be non-trivial, and it should be stated clearly and explicitly, early on. Your thesis can be a positive philosophical point that connects up in some clear way with the topics of the class, or it can be a criticism of a claim or argument made in a reading.

*Argument:* Your argument(s) for the thesis should appeal to premises that would seem plausible to the great majority of people, including most people who have not already accepted your thesis.

*Replies to objections:* Consider how someone doubting your thesis might object to your argument, and say why these objections ultimately do not persuade you.

*Things not to do:* Do not choose a topic too big for a 6,000-8,000-word paper. Do not make errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling, word usage, formatting, and the like. Make use of a good writing guide.

## Grading

Your graduate student handbook contains the following remarks about grading standards:

Grading standards can vary among professors. However, a majority of the faculty have come to a reasonable amount of consensus concerning grading standards for graduate students. The standards accepted by most professors are the following:

“The grades for graduate students tend to run from A to B+, although lower grades are occasionally given. ... Although professors naturally differ in their grading patterns, and in their understanding of those grades, there is some consensus among the faculty in the Department that A’s should be given for excellent work, A-’s for good but not great work, and B+’s for work that is problematic, though still satisfactory.”

But I mean something slightly different. I use ‘A’ to mean *exceeds expectations*, ‘A-’ to mean *meets expectations*, and ‘B+’ to mean *fails to meet expectations*. The most common grade in the class will almost certainly be an A-, but some A’s and B+’s, and perhaps even some B’s, will also be given. Your final grade for the class will be determined mainly by your term paper, but your weekly emails and your classroom participation will also influence your grade.

## A Possible Course Schedule (likely to change)

Date	Topics	Readings (due on date listed; subject to change)
M 8/22	Introduction to the philosophy of welfare	Heathwood, “Welfare” Sumner, “The Concept of Welfare” Parfit, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best?”
M 8/29	The Subjective/Objective Distinction in Welfare; Objective Theories	Sumner, “Welfare and Subjectivity” Sumner, “Objective Theories” Hooker, “Does Moral Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent?”
M 9/12	Objective Theories: Perfectionism	Hurka, <i>Perfectionism</i> , chapters 1-4 Dorsey, “Three Arguments for Perfectionism”
M 9/19	Hedonism	Sumner, “Hedonism” Nozick, from <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> Feldman, “What We Learn from the Experience Machine” Crisp, “Hedonism Reconsidered”
M 9/26	Hedonism	Feldman, <i>Pleasure and the Good Life</i> , chapters 2-5
M 10/3	Hedonism	TBA, or catch-up
M 10/10	Preferentism	Sidgwick, “Good,” from <i>The Methods of Ethics</i> Brandt, “The Criticism of Pleasures and Intrinsic Desires” Kaplow and Shavell, “Welfare Economics” Rosati, “Internalism and the Good for a Person”
M 10/17	Preferentism	Adams, “Well-Being and Excellence” Gibbard, <i>Wise Choices, Apt Feelings</i> , 18-22 Sobel, “Full-Information Theories of Well-Being”

		Rosati, "Persons, Perspectives, and Full-Information Theories of the Good" Arneson, "Human Flourishing versus Desire Satisfaction"
M 10/24	Preferentism	Heathwood, "The Problem of Defective Desires" TBA, or catch-up
M 10/31	Eudaimonism	Sumner, "Welfare and Happiness" Feldman, "Whole Life Satisfaction Concepts of Happiness"
M 11/7 - M 11/14	<u>Topics to be determined by class. Some possibilities:</u> Hybrid Theories (Darwall, Kagan) Aim Achievement Theories (Keller, Portmore, Scanlon) Aggregation (Parfit, Norcross, Rachels) Holism (Velleman) Critiques of the debate or the very concept (Kagan, Keller, Campbell) Welfarism (Sumner, Keller) Positive psychology (Kahneman, Diener, Feldman)	
M 11/28	<u>Term paper workshop:</u> paper proposals due; bring them with you, prepared to discuss them; email them to me in advance, too.	Readings related to your term paper
M 12/5	Heathwood's Theory	Heathwood, "Subjective Desire Satisfactionism"
M 12/12	Term Papers Due (by email, as a Microsoft Word attachment)	