

PHIL 298: The Philosophy of Happiness & Wellbeing

Course Information

Professor: Dr. [Anna Brinkerhoff](#)

- Email: anna.brinkerhoff@concordia.ca
- Virtual Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:00P – 3:00P
 - Zoom Link: <https://concordia-ca.zoom.us/j/86794983565>
- In-person Office Hours: By appointment only
- Office Number: S-GN MR-08

Class Location: H 920 SGW

Class Time: Wednesdays and Fridays, 2:45PM – 4:00PM

Course Description

Happiness matters - we all want to be happy. But what, exactly, is happiness? Is it a state of mind? An emotion? Or something else? And what's so good about being happy, anyway? To what extent does happiness contribute to wellbeing?

This course serves as an introduction to the philosophy of happiness and wellbeing that explores these and related questions, with a focus on work within the contemporary analytic tradition. It is broken into six units. Units 1 and 2 explore various accounts of the nature of happiness (Unit 1) and the nature of wellbeing (Unit 2). The rest of the course covers a wide range of normative questions about happiness and wellbeing, and how they fit into a good life. Unit 3 explores questions about death and wellbeing over a lifetime: Is death bad for the one who dies? Would an immortal life be better than our mortal one? What does wellbeing over a lifetime look like? Unit 4 explores questions about morality and meaning: Is the morally best life the best life there is? Is life absurd? If not, what makes a life meaningful? Unit 5 explores questions about wellbeing from historically marginalized perspectives: How should we think about wellbeing from a feminist perspective? From an animal rights perspective? From the perspective of people who are disabled? Unit 6 explores questions about hard choices and the politics of wellbeing: What aspects of wellbeing should the government promote? To what extent is government paternalism justified in order to promote citizens' wellbeing? How should we approach life's hard choices?

Course Objectives

Students who complete this course should be able to do the following:

- Clearly communicate philosophical ideas in writing
- Think reasonably about controversial issues, seeing both sides of them
- Discuss complicated issues in respectful and productive ways with fellow students
- Charitably and accurately explain central positions in the philosophy of happiness and wellbeing in their own words
- Identify, reconstruct, and explain arguments in the course readings, and critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of those arguments
- Construct their own arguments about the course material
- Apply abstract theoretical thought to real-life situations

Course Materials

No textbook is required for this course. All course readings will be available on Moodle under the relevant unit.

Important Dates

Friday January 31: no in-person class – asynchronous video + Ethics Lecture

Friday February 21: midterm exam (in class)

Saturday March 22: philosophy paper due

Saturday April 12: real world reflection due

April 16, 9:00AM – 11:00AM: final exam

Course Requirements and Grade Breakdown

Course grades will be based on the following components:

Reading Summaries	10%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%
Philosophy Paper	30%
Real-World Reflection	10%

Reading Summaries: Starting the third day of class, I will assign regular readings – one required reading per class. You will need to do the reading carefully before class, preferably more than once. In order to hold you accountable for doing the readings, you must write up a summary for each required reading (summaries are not required for the optional readings). Summaries should be between 100-200 words for each required reading. Summaries should be clearly written in your own words in paragraph form, not bullet points. Reading summaries will be graded on a pass/fail basis. To pass, your summary must make it clear that you completed the reading and understood its main points. Summaries for a given day's reading must be submitted under the relevant assignment on Moodle BEFORE the start of class (2:45PM). Late posts will not be accepted (*no exceptions*) and there is no way to make up missed posts. You get two freebies for the semester – you can miss up to two reading summaries without a penalty to your grade, no questions asked. But for each missed post over 2 (no matter what the reason), your reading summary grade will be lowered by 15%.

Exams: You will have a closed-book, in-person midterm exam and final exam, each worth 25% of your course grade. Exams are designed to test your knowledge of the basic concepts, arguments, and views covered in each unit. The midterm exam will cover material from units 1 & 2. The final exam will cover material from units 3, 4, 5, & 6. Exams will consist of a mix of true/false and multiple-choice questions. The midterm exam will take place in class on **Friday February 21**. There are no make-up midterm exams offered (see missed exam policy below). The final exam will take place in person on **Wednesday April 16 from 9:00AM – 11:00AM**. If you miss the final exam and want to make it up, you have to apply for a DEF through the university (see missed exam policy below).

Philosophy Paper: You will write one short philosophy paper for this course. Papers should be around 1500 words, but no less than 1200 and no more than 1800. You will choose any one of the assigned readings from the course to write on. The first part should be devoted to clearly, accurately, and charitably presenting one of the author's arguments. The second part of the paper should be devoted to your own original philosophical evaluation of that argument. During class time on Wednesday February 5, I will be hosting a writing workshop during class time to teach how to write a philosophy paper step-by-step. The paper is due on Moodle at 11:59p on Saturday March 22.

Real World Reflection: By the end of the course, you will submit a short real-world reflection. Reflections should be around 500 words, but no more than 800 words. The goal of this reflection is to bridge theory and practice by critically reflecting on some aspect of the course material and linking it to a personal lived experience, current event, or pop culture. First, you will choose some aspect from the course material – a topic, idea, or view – that resonated with you. Second, you will explain how this aspect applies to a real-world issue. For example, you might discuss how your chosen aspect

of the course material (a) gives you insight into or makes you re-think a personal experience; (b) is relevant to in a real-life controversial social or political issue; (c) relates to a current event or topic in the news; (d) plays out in a movie, TV show, or book; (e) influences pop culture; or (f) shows up in daily life. Reflections are due on Moodle by 11:59p on Saturday April 12. You can find the rubric for the real world reflections on Moodle.

Grading Policies

Course grades will be calculated according to university and departmental guidelines.

A+	90%-100%	B+	77%-79.9%
A	85%-89.9%	B	73%-76.9%
A-	80%-84.9%	B-	70%-72.9%
C+	67%-69.9%	D+	57%-59.9%
C	63%-66.9%	D	53%-56.9%
C-	60%-62.9%	D-	50%-52.9%

The Undergraduate Calendar 16.3 specifies that As, Bs, and Cs are for “outstanding,” “very good” and “satisfactory” work, respectively. The Philosophy Department interprets this to mean that: Cs are awarded for work that is adequate, yet in some way fails to completely meet all expectations and requirements; Bs are awarded for work that fully meets all expectations and requirements; As are reserved for outstanding work that exceeds expectations and requirements by, e.g., demonstrating outstanding rigor, clarity, or insight.

As are awarded for *outstanding work* – work that exceeds expectations and requirements by demonstrating outstanding rigor, clarity, insight, or philosophical sophistication.

Bs are awarded for *very good work* – work that fully meets all expectations and requirements.

Cs are awarded for *satisfactory work* – work that generally meets the expectations of the assignment and demonstrates adequate understanding of the course material, but falls short in crucial respects.

Ds are given to *marginal work* – work that does not meet the general expectations and requirements of the assignment.

Fs are given to *poor work* – work that makes no serious attempts to meet the formal and substantial expectations and requirements of the assignment.

Usually, the class average is in the C+ to B- range, and less than 20% of students earn As.

Course Policies

Attendance: Although I do not give grades directly for attendance, you are expected to attend every class session (barring illness or emergency). We are covering very difficult material, and attending class is vital for understanding it. Students who miss class sessions tend to do very poorly on exams. They also tend to do very poorly on papers. It is your personal responsibility to catch up on material from classes you do miss. I will not re-present class material for students who miss class.

Missed Exams: It is impossible to make up a midterm exam. If you miss the midterm exam and have a valid excuse, the weight of your midterm exam will be transferred in full to the final exam (in which case your final exam will be worth 50% of your course grade). A valid excuse consists of things like

serious illness or severe injury, recent death in your immediate family, and fire. If you miss the midterm exam without a valid excuse, you will receive a 0 for the midterm. If you miss your final exam and you have a valid excuse, you must apply for a deferred exam through the university – for more information about deferring final exams, [click here](#).

Email: The best way to contact me is usually by email. When you email me, please include your name and mention that you are in PHIL 298. On weekdays, I typically respond to emails within 24 hours. I do not respond to emails over weekends. Please note that I do not answer lengthy philosophical questions over e-mail – it's best to ask me those during office hours. Basically, if I can't respond to your question in one or two sentences, you need to come talk to me about it during office hours.

Late Work: All assignments are due on dates and times indicated on the syllabus. Late reading summaries will not be accepted. Late papers and reflections will be deducted 10% for each day after the due date they are submitted. An assignment is considered late if it is submitted at any point past the deadline (including just a minute). Late reflections will not be accepted more than three days after the deadline. Papers that are submitted more than three days late (with or without an extension) will be returned with a grade but without further feedback.

Extensions: If you require an extension on an assignment, ask *well before* the assignment is due. Last-minute and day-of extensions will not be granted. Extensions requested after the deadline has passed will also not be granted. If you receive an extension, you cannot submit your assignment after the extended deadline. Please note that you can start on your papers and reflections at pretty much any point during the course, so please plan ahead. Having lots of work in other courses during the week an assignment is due, or having last-minute computer issues, are typically not good enough reasons to justify an extension. Given grading deadlines, I cannot offer significant extensions on real world reflections.

Participation: There will be frequent small-group discussions throughout the course, and you are expected to participate in these discussions consistently and respectfully.

Lecture notes and slides: After each class session, I will post lecture notes from that session on Moodle. You can use these lecture notes, in conjunction with the notes you take in class, to help prepare for your exams. You can also use these notes to help you catch up on work from days you must miss class. Please note that I will not post or share lecture slides.

Technology: You are permitted to use laptops during class, but only for class-related activities – for example, consulting the day's reading or note-taking. Phone use is not permitted. If I notice that you are using personal technology for something that's not directly class-related, I will ask you to put it away immediately. Sometimes, I will request that all technology be put away during discussion.

Extra Credit Policy: I do not offer extra credit, make-up assignments, or alternative assignments. I do not boost or round-up course grades. Out of fairness, all course grades will be based on the components dictated in the syllabus.

Office Hours: I will hold weekly hours virtually on Zoom every Tuesday between 1:00P – 3:00P. The Zoom link can be found above on the syllabus, as well as on Moodle. Office hours start the second week of class (January 21) and end the last week of class (April 8). You may come to office hours to chat about course content, your exams, your papers, and your reflections. Please note: I cannot read over drafts of papers or reflections, but I am happy to chat with you about your ideas and arguments.

Chat GPT: Written assignments for this course must be your own original work – you are thus prohibited from using Generative AI (such as Chat GPT) to write philosophy papers, reading summaries, or real world reflections. It is an academic offense to present something that was AI-

generated as your own idea, or your own expression of an idea. Students who commit this academic offense may be charged under Articles 18 (general cheating/plagiarism/dishonest behavior) and 19a (plagiarism) under Concordia's Academic Code of Conduct.

Moodle grades: Please note that the grades on Moodle do not accurately reflect your course grade – inputs on Moodle are not weighted properly. I keep official separate records of grades outside of Moodle.

French: Students have the right to submit their written work in French. Unfortunately, however, I do not speak, read, or understand French well enough yet to grade French work. So, if you wish to submit work in French, please notify me of this well in advance so that I can arrange an alternative francophone grader for you.

Pronouns: All students have the right to request which names and pronouns instructors use to refer to them. I respect this right and will do my best to satisfy any of these requests. If you want to be called by a name other than what is listed on the class list, please feel free to pass along the information to me. If I mistakenly use the wrong pronoun when referring to you, please advise me as soon as possible.

Accommodations for Special Needs

I strive to make this course a welcoming place for all perspectives, where all students are treated as valued and respected members of the class community regardless of gender, sex, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual identity, socioeconomic background, or ability. Please reach out to me early in the term if you have a condition, religious commitment, or extenuating circumstance that might require accommodations or modification of any of the course procedures.

In order to be eligible for additional time on any of these assignments, you need to register with the Access Centre for Students with Disabilities (ACSD). They will assess your condition and formulate a Letter of Accommodation. If you require further accommodations, please book these yourself with ACSD.

University and Departmental Policies

Academic Integrity: The most common offense under the Academic Code of Conduct is plagiarism, which the Code defines as “the presentation of the work of another person as one’s own or without proper acknowledgement.” This includes material copied word for word from books, journals, Internet sites, professor’s course notes, etc. It refers to material that is paraphrased but closely resembles the original source. It also includes for example the work of a fellow student, an answer on a quiz, data for a lab report, a paper or assignment completed by another student. It might be a paper purchased from any source. Plagiarism does not refer to words alone –it can refer to copying images, graphs, tables and ideas. “Presentation” is not limited to written work. It includes oral presentations, computer assignments and artistic works. Finally, if you translate the work of another person into any other language and do not cite the source, this is also plagiarism. **In simple words: do not copy, paraphrase or translate anything from anywhere without saying where you obtained it.**

Sexual Violence: Concordia’s [Policy Regarding Sexual Violence](#) defines sexual violence as “any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. This includes, but is not limited to sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, degrading sexual imagery, distribution of sexual images or video of a community member without their consent, and cyber harassment or cyber stalking of a sexual nature or related to a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity and/or presentation.” The Philosophy Department condemns sexual violence. The Department encourages all students to report sexual violence to the Department Chair, the Dean, or to the Office of Rights and Responsibilities. Concordia’s [Sexual Assault Resource Centre \(SARC\)](#) is an important resource on campus for students needing support, accompaniment, resources or information about sexual violence. SARC may convene a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) to support a survivor/victim reporting sexual violence. See the [Policy](#) for further details. Other resources include the [Centre for Gender Advocacy](#) and the [CSU Advocacy Centre](#). The Philosophy Department welcomes Concordia’s [Consensual](#)

[Romantic Or Sexual Relationships Guidelines](#), which “strongly discourages all instructors from commencing or continuing any consensual romantic or sexual relationship with a student.”

Code of Rights and Responsibility: All individuals participating in courses are expected to be professional and constructive throughout the course, including in their communications. Concordia students are subject to the Code of Rights and Responsibilities which applies both when students are physically and virtually engaged in any University activity, including classes, seminars, meetings, etc. Students engaged in University activities must respect this Code when engaging with any members of the Concordia community, including faculty, staff, and students, whether such interactions are verbal or in writing, face to face or online/virtual. Failing to comply with the Code may result in charges and sanctions, as outlined in the Code.

Intellectual Property: Content belonging to instructors shared in online courses, including, but not limited to, online lectures, course notes, and video recordings of classes remain the intellectual property of the faculty member. It may not be distributed, published or broadcast, in whole or in part, without the express permission of the faculty member. Students are also forbidden to use their own means of recording any elements of an online class or lecture without express permission of the instructor. Any unauthorized sharing of course content may constitute a breach of the Academic Code of Conduct and/or the Code of Rights and Responsibilities. As specified in the Policy on Intellectual Property, the University does not claim any ownership of or interest in any student IP. All university members retain copyright over their work.

Extraordinary Circumstances: In the event of extraordinary circumstances and pursuant to the Academic Regulations, the University may modify the delivery, content, structure, forum, location and/or evaluation scheme. In the event of such extraordinary circumstances, students will be informed of the changes.

French: Students have the right to submit their written work in French.

Territorial Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today. Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. I respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change.

Italicized readings are optional – no reading summary is required for optional readings.

Assignment deadlines are highlighted in blue. Exam dates are in red font.

Unit 0: Course Intro

Crash Course on Arguments

Wednesday January 15: no reading

Unit 1: The Nature of Happiness

What is the nature of happiness?

Friday January 17: Introduction to happiness – no reading

Wednesday January 22: Haybron, “Hedonism”

Friday January 24: Haybron, “Life Satisfaction”

Wednesday January 29: Haybron, “Emotional State”

Friday January 31: *Haybron, “Psychic Affirmation”* – **No In-Person Class** (Ethics Lecture + asynchronous video)

Writing Workshop!

Wednesday February 5: *Pryor, “Guidelines for Writing a Philosophy Paper”*

Unit 2: The Nature of Wellbeing

What is the nature of wellbeing?

Friday February 7: sections 9.1 – 9.2 of Tiberius, “Prudential Value”

Wednesday February 12: sections 9.3 – 9.4 of Tiberius, “Prudential Value”

Friday February 14: Woodard, “Hybrid Theories”

What’s the connection between happiness and wellbeing?

Wednesday February 19: no reading

In-Class Midterm Exam

Friday February 21: in-person, closed-book exam covering material from Units 1 & 2

Reading Week

Wednesday February 26: NO CLASS – Reading Week

Friday February 28: NO CLASS – Reading Week

Unit 3: Death and Lifetime Wellbeing

Is death bad for the one who dies?

Wednesday March 5: Nagel, “Death” & *Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus”*

Would an immortal life be better than a mortal one?

Friday March 7: Ismael, “Death” & *Williams, “The Makropulos Case”*

What does wellbeing over a lifetime look like?

Wednesday March 12: Velleman, “Wellbeing and time”

Unit 4: Morality and Meaning

Is the morally best life the best life there is?

Friday March 14: Wolf, "Moral Saints"

Is life absurd? If not, what makes a life meaningful?

Wednesday March 19: Nagel, "The Absurd"

Friday March 21: Wolf, "Happiness and Meaning"

Philosophy paper due at 11:59p on Saturday March 22

Unit 5: Wellbeing from Historically Marginalized Perspectives

How should we think about wellbeing from the perspective of feminism? Non-human animals? People with Disabilities?

Wednesday March 26: Holroyd, "Feminism and Wellbeing"

Friday March 28: Rice, "Animals and Wellbeing"

Wednesday April 2: Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability" & Campbell and Stramondo, "The Complicated Relationship Between Disability and Wellbeing"

Unit 6: Hard Choices & The Politics of Wellbeing

What aspects of wellbeing should the government promote?

Friday April 4: Nussbaum, "Creating Capabilities"

To what extent (if any) is government paternalism justified?

Wednesday April 9: Flanigan, "Seat Belt Mandates and Paternalism"

What's the best way to approach life's hard choices?

Friday April 11: Chang, [Hard Choices](#) (YouTube video)

Real-World Reflection due by 11:59p on Saturday April 12

In-Person Final Exam

Wednesday April 16 from 9:00AM – 11:00AM: in-person, closed note exam covering material from Units 3, 4, 5 & 6