

GESM 120: Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry
Section 35357: What is the best way to live?
Spring 2017

Tuesday and Thursday, 12.30 – 1.50 pm
GFS 228
Instructor: Ralph Wedgwood

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Should you have any overarching goals in your life – for example, to be rich, famous, and successful? Or to have fun and be happy? Or to serve your fellow human beings or to make the world a better place? Or some goal that is part of a traditional religious practice? Or whatever goal you happen to want to pursue? Or perhaps it is better *not* to have any overarching goals, but just to muddle through life with no preconceived aims?

Some philosophers have thought that there might be *general* answers to these questions –answer to these questions that would be right, not just for you, but for anyone who is capable of reflecting on the question of how to live. We will try to explore the ideas and arguments of these philosophers.

We shall by looking at the question of what is good for a person – or what it is to have a good life. Then we shall look at theories of what is morally right and wrong. Finally, we shall look at a number of particular moral problems that pose test cases for different ways of thinking about how to live. The readings will be taken both from classics texts from the history of philosophy and from more contemporary philosophical discussions.

This course satisfies USC's GE-B (Humanistic Inquiry) and GE Seminar requirements. It is only open to freshmen.

Learning Objectives (Humanistic Inquiry):

- Reflect on what it means to be human through close study of human experience throughout time and across diverse cultures;
- Cultivate a critical appreciation for various forms of human expression, including literature, language, philosophy, and the arts, as well as develop an understanding of the contexts from which these forms emerge;

- Engage with lasting ideas and values that have animated humanity throughout the centuries for a more purposeful, more ethical, and intellectually richer life;
- Learn to read and interpret actively and analytically, to think critically and creatively, and to write and speak persuasively;
- Learn to evaluate ideas from multiple perspectives and to formulate informed opinions on complex issues of critical importance in today's global world;
- Learn to collaborate effectively through traditional and new ways of disseminating knowledge.

Having successfully met the learning objectives, you will have acquired both practical skills and more intangible competencies. You will master strategies for finding, reading and understanding relevant information from different genres, for analyzing complex problems, for making and evaluating compelling arguments, and for preparing effective presentations. You will become a clearer thinker and a stronger writer. You will gain new insights and be inspired. You will be ready for a life of learning and creativity.

Required Texts (available from the USC Bookstore):

1. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press)
2. Roger Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism* (Routledge)
3. Russ Shafer-Landau, ed. *The Ethical Life: Fundamental Readings in Ethics and Moral Problems*, 3rd edition (Oxford University Press)

Other readings will be distributed electronically

We'll be using Blackboard (<http://blackboard.usc.edu>).

Course Requirements:

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| 1. Reading blog: | 10% |
| 2. Attendance/Class Participation | 10% |
| 3. Three papers (1000-1500 words) | 20% each; |
| 4. Final exam: | 20% |

Reading blog: for every reading assignment (but with 5 passes) you must submit a brief blog post to Blackboard (150-300 words), which articulates *either* (a) one concern you have about the author's view, or (b) one thing that puzzles you about it, or (c) a (courteous and charitable!) response to another student's post on the same reading. These must be posted by 9am the morning of the class for which the reading is assigned. They will be graded simply as Satisfactory/Not Satisfactory.

It is important that you attend and participate in class meetings, and complete the assigned reading (see schedule below) prior to class.

Paper topics will be handed out at least two weeks in advance. The papers will be due at the ends of Weeks 5, 10, and 15 respectively.

The final exam will be a 2-hour written exam, during the final examination period.

Late Policy:

Papers submitted late without an extension will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. A to A-); additional 1/3 grade penalties will be applied after 24 hrs late and for every subsequent week late.

Device Policy:

Please mute all cellphones, and do not use them in class for any purpose including texting, messaging, browsing, etc. Laptops may not be used in class.

Disabilities Accommodation:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please have the letter delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS120 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., M-F; phone (213) 740-0776.

Schedule of readings and topics

WEEK 1

1. Introduction

Part 1: What is good for us?

2. Hedonism Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus (in *the Ethical Life*)

WEEK 2

3. Qualitative Hedonism J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chaps. 1–2
4. The “experience machine” Nozick (in *The Ethical Life*)

WEEK 3

5. Discussion of hedonism 1 Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism*, chap. 2
6. Psychological Hedonism J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chaps. 3–4

WEEK 4

7. Discussion of hedonism 2 Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism*, chap. 4
8. Alternatives to hedonism Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Appendix I

WEEK 5

9. Alternatives to hedonism Heathwood (in *The Ethical Life*)
10. Alternatives to hedonism Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism*, chap. 3

Part 2a: What is morally right and wrong? -- Utilitarianism

WEEK 6

11. Utilitarianism J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chap. 2 (again!)
12. Utilitarianism and rights J. S. Mill *Utilitarianism*, chap. 5

WEEK 7

13. Forms of utilitarianism Smart (in *The Ethical Life*)
14. Forms of utilitarianism Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism*, chap. 5

Part 2b: What is morally right and wrong? Alternatives to utilitarianism

WEEK 8

15. Criticisms of utilitarianism Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism*, chap. 6
16. Kant: The good will Kant (in *The Ethical Life*)

WEEK 9

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| 17. | Kant: The moral law | Kant (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |
| 18. | Hobbesian ethics | Hobbes (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |

WEEK 10

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| 19. | W. D. Ross | Ross (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |
| 20. | Philippa Foot | Foot (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |

Part 3: Ethical problems

WEEK 11

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| 21. | Poverty and hunger | Singer (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |
| 22. | Poverty and hunger | Narveson (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |

WEEK 12

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| 23. | Is it wrong to eat meat? | Norcross (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |
| 24. | Is it wrong to eat meat? | Frey (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |

WEEK 13

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| 25. | Abortion | Marquis (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |
| 26. | Abortion | Thomson (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |

WEEK 14

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| 27. | Human enhancement | Sandel (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |
| 28. | Human enhancement | Savulescu (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |

Coda: The status of morality

WEEK 15

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| 29. | Are values subjective? | Mackie (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |
| 30. | Are values objective? | Enoch (in <i>The Ethical Life</i>) |

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your adviser or program staff to find out more.

Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations:
http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html p

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.