

Winter 2025 – Carleton University
PHIL 2330: Happiness, Well-being, and the Good Life
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:05 pm - 2:25 pm

Instructor: Dr. Kyla Bruff

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 3pm – 5pm in 3A56, Paterson Hall, or online by appointment

Course Delivery: In-person

I. Description:

What does it mean to live well? How can we live a good life and be happy? What makes life meaningful? These are questions that concern all of us.

In this course, we will examine eight different perspectives on the good life, which direct us on how to live well. By the end of the course, you will describe and defend your own perspective on the good life. This will be done in the form of your own philosophical “apology.”¹

We will begin the course with the Anishinaabe notion of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, a wholistic, balanced approach to living well in relation to our interdependence, which calls for respect for all forms of life. Beginning this approach will allow us to adopt a critical lens towards the biases of the Western approaches to the good life, which we will study throughout the rest of the courses, and their relationships to colonization.

Subsequently, we will study Plato’s thesis that caring for yourself as an individual involves pursuing the truth collectively with others. Through a study of Socrates’ *Apology*, we will start the course by examining the importance of doing justice to others and education in caring for our souls, or living the good life.

We will then examine Aristotle’s view that the human being’s activity should accord with reason in the pursuit of happiness. We will explore whether moderation, or the idea that virtues must aim at a “mean between extremes,” is conducive to living the good life. Following this, we will examine Aristotle’s view of friendship and determine how it applies to our own friendships and thus to living a virtuous, happy life.

Our next approach to the good life will lead us to the Stoic tradition. Stoicism has enjoyed a new surge in popularity, especially in online spaces, throughout the pandemic, at least in part due to its practical teachings, which help individuals confront hurdles outside of their control. By reading sections from Marcus Aurelius’ meditations, we will investigate whether or not living a good life requires that we scrutinize our own role in our problems and the despair we experience in our lives, and then to set our own, personal standards. We will examine how one’s understanding of one’s place in the universe (or cosmos) relates to one’s struggles and successes.

¹ This final assignment idea was inspired by: <https://godandgoodlife.nd.edu/policies-structure/>

After Plato, Aristotle and Aurelius, we will consider whether God, religion, and scripture should play a role in our attempts to live well and be happy. We will rely on Saint Augustine's autobiographical text, *Confessions*, to guide us through this inquiry.

In trying to live well, many people find it necessary to discipline themselves to behave in accordance with duties and the principles they legislate, or set up, for themselves. We will explore this approach to the good life by jumping into the eighteenth century, reading sections from Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. In carrying out their moral duty, a good person, on Kant's account, self-legislates rational principles, which in turn guide their action. For Kant, living the good life involves a high level of self-control. Nietzsche, on the other hand, critiques this endorsement of self-constraint, together with the claims that our decisions on how to live well should follow the strict principles of reason or those of religion. For Nietzsche, to live a good life means both to affirm life but also to suffer in solitude on the journey to self-improvement.

Finally, through Martha C. Nussbaum's work, we will evaluate the role of emotions in making judgments about what is important for our well-being. Through emotions, we expose our own vulnerability and neediness with regards to others and the world.

At the end of this course, you will have the opportunity to evaluate which conceptions of the good life along with their corresponding demands are most applicable to your own life.

II. Preclusions: None

III. Prerequisite(s): None

IV. Learning Outcomes:

- to understand and be able to reconstruct the arguments in favour of different concepts of happiness, well-being and the good life in the history of philosophy
- to be able to critically analyse, relate and juxtapose different approaches to the good life
- to be able to defend, in consideration of a broad range of philosophical arguments, your own personal approach to how to live a good life

V. Course readings and texts:

All required readings for this course will be made available to you online via Ares. **You are not required to purchase any course texts.**

If you do want to purchase a physical copy of any of the books in which our reading selections are found, the corresponding editions can be easily found and purchased online. ***This is not required.***

Unit I: Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin: a wholistic, balanced approach to interdependence and respect for all forms of life

Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, "Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology: A Spirit-centered Way in Anishinaabe Research," *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2010.

Unit II: The good life as seeking the truth with others, while examining and improving oneself

Plato, “The Apology” in *Plato’s Apology, Crito and Phaedrus*, trans. Henry Cary, published by Andrews UK Ltd., 2012.

Unit III: The quest to be happy through the exercise of reason and developing friendships

Aristotle, Books II and VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, published by Oxford University Press, 2009.

Unit IV: The power of the mind to adjust one’s perspective

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Martin Hammond, published by Penguin Classics, 2006.

Optional reading:

“The Daily Stoic: Meditations by Marcus Aurelius: Book Summary, Key Lessons and Best Quotes”

<https://dailystoic.com/meditations-marcus-aurelius/>

Unit V: God and the Good Life

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, published by Oxford University Press, 2008.

Unit VI: The good life as requiring self-discipline and self-control

Immanuel Kant – *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Allen W. Wood, published by Yale University Press, 2002.

Unit VII: The affirmation of life, the value of solitude and risk-taking, without an appeal to transcendence

Friedrich Nietzsche – *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman, published by Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Unit VIII: Emotions as evaluative judgments, which show us what is important and our own vulnerability, in pursuing the good life

Martha C. Nussbaum – Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance in *Thinking about Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions*, ed. Robert C. Solomon, published by Oxford University Press, 2004, Part VI, Ch. 12.

Optional reading: Interview with Martha Nussbaum in the Daily Stoic

<https://dailystoic.com/martha-nussbaum/>

VI. Calendar description: A philosophical exploration of what makes a good human life. Topics may include the role of happiness, well-being, and flourishing in a good life, the relations between these aspects, and the extent to which they depend on luck and social considerations.

VII. Course calendar and overview:

Date	Themes, Deadlines & Feedback	Required Reading
Jan. 7	Course Introduction	None
Jan. 9	The Anashinaabe concept of “mino-bimaadiziwin” (the Good Life)	Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, “Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology,” pp. 12-18
Jan. 14	Re-conceptualizing mino-bimaadiziwin in order to critically examine Western approaches to knowledge and the good life	Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige, “Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology,” pp. 19-24
Jan. 16	Socrates’ defence	Plato, <i>The Apology</i> , sections 1-16, pp. 10-26
Jan. 21	Socrates’ view of the good life and death as a blessing	Plato, <i>The Apology</i> , sections 16-22, pp. 27-45
Jan. 23	Happiness	Aristotle, Book I of the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 3-22
Jan. 28	The golden mean	Aristotle, Book II of the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 23-37
Jan. 30	Test 1	
Feb.4	Friendship as essential to the good life	Aristotle, Book VIII of the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , pp. 142-162
Feb. 6	To what extent do we create our own problems? Are we in control of what bothers us?	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i> , Book 5, pp. 35-41
Feb. 11	Living at one with nature and dealing with obstacles	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i> , Book 5, pp. 41-45
Feb. 13	One’s place in the universe in relation to one’s struggles Test 1 returned	Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i> , Book 9, pp. 83-93
Feb. 18 & 20	NO CLASSES – MIDTERM BREAK	
Feb. 25	Sin	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , book 2, pp. 24-34
Feb. 27	Conversion and the will to serve God	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , book 8, pp. 140-154
Mar. 4	God and the good life	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , book 10 (sections 10.31-10.34), pp. 196-200
Mar. 6	Introduction to Kant and moral duty	Kant, Preface and First Section of the <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 3-21

Mar. 11	The first formulation of the categorical imperative as the principle of duty	Kant, <i>The Second Section of the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 22-38
Mar. 13	The second and third formulations of the categorical imperative as the principle of duty	Kant, <i>The Second Section of the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 44-58
Mar. 18	Questioning the nature of truth and a priori morality	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Part 1: On the prejudices of philosophers, sections 1-11, pages 5-14
Mar. 20	The free spirit	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Part 2: The free spirit, sections 24-33, pages 25-34
Mar. 25	Will to power; mastery; affirming life and the value of solitude	Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Part 2: The free spirit, sections 257-261 & 271-274, 151-158 & 167-168
Mar. 27	Test 2	
Apr. 1	The importance of emotions	Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance," 307-313.
Apr. 3	Nussbaum's neo-Stoicism	Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance," 313-329.
Apr. 8	Course conclusion Test 2 Returned Final assignment due	

VIII. Evaluation

The evaluation for this course is as follows:

- **Test 1** on the concept of *mino-bimaadiziwin*, Plato, and Aristotle (Books I and II only) (Jan. 30), **30%**
- **Test 2** on Aurelius, Augustine, Kant and Nietzsche (Mar. 27), **35%**
- **Final Assignment: "My Apology,"** (due Apr. 8), **35%**.

The two tests will be written in person, during class time and cannot, other than in exceptional, extenuating circumstances, be taken on an alternative date. The tests are intended to assess your grasp of the main ideas explored the course, their context, and their possible, real-world application.

For your final assignment, please make sure all sources are cited in line with Carleton's Academic Integrity guidelines, listed here:

<https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>.

The "My Apology" assignment will be submitted electronically on Brightspace. It should be typed in Times New Roman font, size 12, 1.5 line spacing with a title. Please submit your assignment as a .doc or .docx file. Late assignments will be penalized by -3% per day for a maximum of five days extension. The use of Chat GPT or other AI tools when writing your assignment is not permitted.

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2024-25)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EDC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).

- *Accommodation for [Student Activities](#)*: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Important Dates:

Sept. 4	Classes start.
Sept. 17	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 14	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 21-25	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 22	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 6	Last day of fall term classes. <i>Classes follow a Monday schedule</i> . Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 9-21	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 21	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 6	Classes begin.
Jan. 17	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 17	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 17-21	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses.
Mar. 25	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 8	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 9-10	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 11-26	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 18	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 26	All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:

www.carleton.ca/philosophy

520-2110

Registrar's Office:

www.carleton.ca/registrar

520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:

www.carleton.ca/academicadvising

520-7850

Writing Services:

<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>

520-3822

MacOdrum Library

<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>

520-2735

