

**HAPPINESS AND WELL BEING: MEANING, MEANINGLESSNESS, AND HAPPINESS WITHOUT  
MEANING**

**NATHAN ROTHSCHILD  
FALL 2024 SYLLABUS**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES**

We tend to think that a person's life goes well if it has meaning. This thought is as common to sophisticated philosophical theorizing, as it is to self-help books and late-night conversations. But what exactly is the thought? In this class, that is what we will try to figure out. We will ask such questions as, what is meaning? Is meaning a distinct kind of value (different, say, from moral value)? Is our desire for meaning destined to be frustrated because, in some sense, we live in a meaningless world? Or what is not quite the same, is meaning a chimera? Pre-modern thinkers, at least, seemed to have gotten along quite well without the concept of meaning? Do they endorse it under another name? Or is what we call 'meaning' a confusion and dead letter? Perhaps most importantly, if having, or finding meaning is decisive for whether we live a good life, how and why is that the case?

As this last question makes clear, to make progress understanding meaning one must do so hand in hand with thinking about what it is for a life to go well. As a result, in this class we will look at several theories of happiness and well-being, both to understand them in their own right and in order to give ourselves a framework for thinking about the nature and importance of finding meaning in one's life.

We will read texts by, Harry Frankfurt, Susan Wolf, Peter Singer, Bernard Williams, Cora Diamond, Aristotle, and others.

**CLASS TIME AND LOCATION**

T/R period 8-9/9  
Matherly 0115

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION AND OFFICE HOURS**

Nathan Rothschild  
Email: [njrothschild@ufl.edu](mailto:njrothschild@ufl.edu)  
Office: Griffin Floyd 311  
Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-11:00am  
Personal Zoom Address: <https://ufl.zoom.us/j/2935878216>

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

*Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, 0691154503  
*Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle, 1647921457  
All other required texts will be available through Canvas

**REQUIREMENTS**

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Two papers (1000-15000 words each) | 40% |
| Final Paper (2000 words)           | 25% |
| Four Question Assignments          | 20% |
| Participation in Lecture           | 10% |
| Attendance                         | 5%  |

**PAPERS:** You will be required to write three papers over the course of the term. Papers are due by midnight (11:59pm) on their respective due dates. Please submit an electronic copy to Canvas.

- You must ask for an extension at least three full days in advance (barring an emergency). Late assignments will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each day beyond the due date.
- Written work must be in 12pt font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins. Papers must also include a word count and indicate which prompt the paper is answering. Papers that do not conform to these specifications will lose one third of a grade.
- Paper topics will be distributed (roughly) one week in advance. You are also encouraged to write on a topic of your own choosing. However, you must clear the topic with me beforehand.

**QUESTION ASSIGNMENTS:** Students will submit four question assignments over the course of the semester. The task of each assignment is to formulate *one* question the student has about the reading.

- The submission for each assignment should be around one page and no longer. Any material that extends past the one page maximum will not be read.
- Submissions must adhere to the formatting requirements set out above under “Papers.”
- A submitted question assignment should formulate and explain the importance of *one* question that the student has about one of the texts we have been reading.
- This question must be directed at one of the texts we have read since the due date of the previous question assignment. For example, the second question assignment will formulate a question about one of the texts read since the submission of the first question assignment.

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** Missing class will adversely affect your ability to perform well in the course. Students are expected to show up with the text, having done the reading, and prepared to participate.

- Attendance is mandatory. For every unexcused absence beyond the first two, a student’s attendance grade will decrease by 10%. Thus, if a student misses 3 classes, they will receive a 90%, 4 classes, an 80%, and so on.

**GRADING:** The following grade scale will be used to assign final letter grades for the course. See UF grading policies for assigning grade points at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

| Grade Scale | Grade Value |
|-------------|-------------|
| 93≤=A       | A=4.0       |
| 93-90=A-    | A-=3.67     |
| 89-86=B+    | B+=3.33     |
| 85-82=B     | B=3.00      |
| 81-79=B-    | B-=2.67     |
| 78-75=C+    | C+=2.33     |
| 75-72=C     | C=2.00      |
| 71-69=C-    | C-=1.67     |

|          |         |
|----------|---------|
| 68-66=D+ | D+=1.33 |
| 65-62=D  | D=1.00  |
| 61-60=D- | D-=0.67 |
| 59-0=E   | E=0.00  |

## POLICIES

**OFFICE HOURS:** I strongly encourage you to take advantage of office hours. Come by to talk over the material, the paper you are considering writing, concerns, or anything else that has to do with our course.

- I prefer to schedule my office hours by appointment, but drop-ins are also great. If you would like to meet, get in touch and we will arrange a time.
- Office hours will be held in my office.

**TEXTS:** For the required texts, students *must purchase a paper copy of the edition listed on the syllabus*. We will read passages from these texts in class and the texts will figure on the quizzes. As a result, it is imperative that students not use different editions or electronic copies.

**OUTSIDE SOURCES:** Do not use texts or internet sources outside of those listed on the syllabus. If you would like to use an outside source when writing a paper, please clear the text with me first.

**EMAIL:** Email is an essential mode of communication in the course. Students are expected to read all email they receive concerning the course and to do so in a timely fashion.

- *Be sure set your Canvas notifications to "Notify me right away."* I will proceed on the assumption that you have done so.
- If you want to reach me by email, please do so via UF email and not via Canvas. If you have substantive philosophical questions, email is not the best place for these; please come visit me in office hours.

**ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** Please turn off and put away your laptop (etc.) and phone before class period begins. There are exceptions to this policy which I am happy to discuss with you.

**RECORDING LECTURES:** I will not be recording anything.

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

**PLAGIARISM:** You are encouraged to work and exchange ideas with your fellow classmates, and you are heartily encouraged to share drafts of written work. However, you must compose and submit your own papers. Doing otherwise is plagiarism.

Plagiarism is the presenting of another's work as one's own. Plagiarism on any assignment will result in a grade of "E" for the course. Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida's Student Honor Code as follows: "A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): a. Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution. b. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student." Students found guilty of academic misconduct will be prosecuted in accordance with the procedures specified in the UF honesty policy.

*If you are not sure if something counts as plagiarism consult the Honor Code. If you are still unsure, please, do not hesitate to ask.*

**MAKE UP EXAMS:** Requirements for make-up exams are consistent with university policies specified at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drp/>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

#### **ONLINE MATERIALS**

**ONLINE COURSE EVALUATION:** Students are encouraged to provide constructive and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback is available at [gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/](http://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via [ufl.bluera.com/ufl/](http://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/). Summaries of course evaluation results will be available to students at [gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/](http://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/).

**CANVAS E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:** This course is supplemented by online content in the e-Learning environment known as "Canvas." To login to the e-Learning site for this course, go to <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>, click the **e-Learning Login** button under, and on the next page enter your Gatorlink username and password. Logging in will take you to the "My Workspace" page, where you can access the course e-Learning environment by clicking on the course name in the banner toward the top of the page.

- Check "Readings" for all readings, which is under the "Pages" tab.
- Check the "Announcements" and "Calendar" tools in the e-Learning environment for new course content (such as recommended readings) and due dates for assignments.

The official recommended system requirements for e-learning in Canvas are a broadband Internet connection and a fully updated and compatible browser. For Windows based PCs: Firefox 3.x or Internet Explorer 7.x or 8.x. For Macs: Firefox 3.0 or Safari 4.x. (Other browsers such as Opera, Chrome, etc. are not recommended for use with Canvas) If you encounter any difficulties logging in or accessing any of the course content, contact the UF Computing Help Desk at (352) 392-4537. Do not contact the course instructor regarding computer issues.

## UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA RESOURCES

- **Dean of Students Office:** For questions and advice about academic issues, as well as a good place to explore the help available to you, visit the Dean of Students Office website, or call 352-392-1261.
- **The Writing Studio:** The Writing Studio (<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>) offers free assistance to all UF undergraduate and graduate students. They will do things like read your drafts and provide constructive feedback.
- **U Matter, We Care:** If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- **Counseling and Wellness Center:** Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- **Student Health Care Center:** Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.
- **University Police Department:** Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- **UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center:** For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website

## Schedule\*

### Week 1

8/22 Introduction

## Part I: Living Well

### Week 2

8/27 Haybron: *Happiness a Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 6  
Nozick: "The Experience Machine"

8/29 Annas: "Happiness as Achievement"

### Week 3

9/3 Parfit: "What Makes a Life go Best?"

Adams: *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Ch. 3 (Recommended)

9/5 Heathwood: "Which Desires are Relevant to Well Being?"

**9/6 First Question Assignment Due**

## Part II: What's Missing?

### Week 4

9/10 *Fight Club* and *La Belle Du Jour* (or *Spring Breakers*)/*Ikiru*

9/12 Singer: *How Are We to Live?*, Ch. 1

Haybron: *Happiness a Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 7

## Part III: Meaning

### Week 5

9/17 Wolf: "Meaning in Life"

9/19 Frankfurt: *Reasons of Love*, part I-II

### Week 6

9/24 Wolf: "Why it Matters"

**9/25 Second Question Assignment Due**

9/26 Wolf and Frankfurt continued

## Part IV: Meaninglessness

### Week 7

10/1 Camus: "Absurd Reasoning," *The Myth of Sisyphus*

10/3 Nagel: "The Absurd"

**10/4 First Paper Due**

## Part V: Happiness and Virtue

### Week 8

10/8 Wolf, revisited

10/10 Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (I.1-I.5, I.7-I.12)

### Week 9

10/15 Arpaly: *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, “Comment” pp. 85-91

Haidt: *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, “Comment” pp. 92-101, **recommended**

Wolf: *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, response to Arpaly and Haidt, pp. 119-127

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (I.13-II.9)

10/17 **No Class**

10/18 **Third Question Assignment Due**

### Week 10

10/22 Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (III.6-IV.1)

McPherson: “Virtue, Happiness and Meaning”

10/24 McPherson Visit

### Part VI: Meaninglessness II

#### Week 11

10/29 Lear: *Radical Hope*, part I

10/31 Diamond: “Losing One’s Concepts”

#### Week 12

11/4 **Second Paper Due**

11/5 Marx: “Alienated Labor”

Aristotle: *Politics* (III.5)

Aristotle: *Politics* (VII.9-10)

Aristotle: *Politics* (VII), **recommended**

11/7 *Perfect Days*

### Part VII: Happiness—Without Meaning

#### Week 13

11/12 Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (I.1-5, I.7-12)

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (III.1-5, VI.1, 5, 12-13)

11/14 Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (III.6-IV.4)

#### Week 14

11/19 Williams: “The Point of View of the Universe”

Williams: “The Human Prejudice”

11/20 **Fourth Question Assignment Due**

11/21 Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*

**Week 15**  
**No Class Thanksgiving Week**

**Week 16**  
12/3 Concluding Thoughts  
12/5 **No class, reading period**

**Exam Week**  
12/9 **Final Paper Due**

\*As with all class schedules this one is not set in stone. It may change depending on where the material takes us.