

HAPPINESS AND THE GOOD LIFE

(Spring '07, PHI 2990-002)

Michael Waddell, Ph.D.

St. Augustine Center, Rm. 167

michael.waddell@villanova.edu

610.519.6862

<http://www.homepage.villanova.edu/michael.waddell>

Office hours: T/Th, 1-2pm; or by appointment.

DESCRIPTION:

Everyone wants to be happy. But what is happiness? And how does one find it? In this course, we will explore what philosophers, theologians and psychologists have written about happiness and the “good life.” We will contemplate many aspects of human life, including virtue, friendship, pleasure, free will, work, money, and human relationships with God, but we will focus our attention on three questions: is there a purpose toward which life is directed? if so, what is it? and how do we organize our lives to attain it?

OBJECTIVES:

As we address these questions, we will aspire to achieve two goals.

Objective #1: to *understand* what some important philosophers, theologians and psychologists have written about the best way to live.

Objective #2: to *apply* their wisdom to the world around us as we strive to shape good lives and find happiness for ourselves.

REQUIREMENTS:

I. Students are expected to complete the reading assigned for each meeting. Assigned daily readings are the foundation of this course. Since lectures, discussion and written assignments are all based on the readings, it is imperative that each student read the assigned materials before class and come prepared with questions and ideas for discussion. To provide incentive for completing all assigned readings, five reading quizzes will be given during the semester. These quizzes will be distributed during the first five minutes of class; anyone who arrives more than five minutes late (according to the instructor’s timepiece) will not be allowed to take that day’s quiz. Students who do not pass (score >60%) at least three quizzes will lose 10% from their final grade. Because these are “pop” quizzes, they are not repeatable. [Objective #1]

II. Each student must submit two discussion question exercises. These exercises are to accomplish two things: 1) raise a question about the assigned text, and 2) begin to muster an answer to this question. Questions might address the implications of an idea raised by the

author, seek clarification about an ambiguous point in the text, seek to connect the reading to life today, or what have you, as long as they are clearly grounded in the text. The questions will be used to stimulate discussion in Tuesday class meetings. Exercises should be approximately one page long. Discussion questions must be emailed to all small group members and the instructor by 7pm the night before the class meeting for which the relevant reading is due; discussion questions not submitted on time will not receive credit. [Objectives #1 & 2]

III. Students are expected to participate actively in all lectures and discussions. To help ensure preparation for and participation in these activities, 25% of your final grade will be based on the quality and quantity of your class participation. [Objectives #1 & 2]

IV. Each student will write two essays. These essays will provide students with an opportunity to think about their own lives in light of classical texts. Specifically, students will use skills and ideas acquired in their reading of the texts to reflect critically on their own decision-making and the ways of life available to them. [Objective #2]

A. Essay #1: Personal Confessions...

One can read Augustine's *Confessions* as his attempt to make sense of his life as a whole, i.e., to appreciate the various people and experiences that God has used to lead Augustine to Christianity. Using the *Confessions* as a model, write a 5 page essay in which you

A) reflect on some decision that you presently face (or have recently faced)

B) in light of the overarching direction your life seems (or seemed) to be taking.

Feel free to delve as far into your past as you think relevant, and introduce as many relationships, experiences, and so forth as you believe to bear on your current circumstances.

B. Essay #2: Letters from Nietzsche

Imagine that Nietzsche is a friend of one of the characters in the movie *Wall Street*. Write a letter from Nietzsche to this character in which he either commends the character for what he finds admirable about him/her and his/her way of life or chides the character for what Nietzsche finds unworthy of admiration in these things. The letter should be 3-5 pages long.

V. Each student must complete the final exam. The final will be a take home essay exam in which students will have the opportunity to think about the relationships among the findings of positive psychology and the philosophical perspectives of Aristotle, Aquinas and Nietzsche. The essay question(s) for the exam will be distributed well in advance of the exam's due date. Exams may be no longer than 6 pages. [Objective #1]

All written assignments are to be typed and double spaced, employing one inch margins and a font that allows approximately 300 words per page (e.g., Times New Roman 12 pt.). Unless otherwise indicated by the instructor, assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified in the schedule (below). Work submitted on the assigned date but after the specified time will incur a 5% deduction (except for discussion questions, which may not be submitted late). Work will not be accepted after the due date except when prior permission has been given by the instructor or in the case of a serious emergency (as judged by the instructor). Work may not be submitted electronically unless prior permission has been given by the instructor.

EVALUATION:

Your final grade will be tallied according to a simple formula:

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{Essay \#1 (25\%)} + \text{Essay \#2 (20\%)} + \text{Discussion Questions (10\%)} \\ &+ \text{Final Exam (20\%)} + \text{Class Participation (25\%)} = \text{Final Grade} \end{aligned}$$

I use a traditional percentage schema to record and calculate grades. I will distribute this schema as we approach the first graded assignment. I will also distribute grading rubrics for each major assignment.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS:

It is the policy of Villanova University to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability, please contact me outside of class and register with the Learning Support Office by calling 610-519-5636 or emailing “nancy.mott@villanova.edu” as soon as possible. Registration is needed in order to receive accommodations.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Violations of Villanova’s academic integrity policy will be dealt with according to the procedures established by the university. Violations of the academic integrity policy include—but are not limited to—cheating on exams, plagiarizing another persons ideas or statements, fabricating data, handing in the same work in two different classes, and so forth. A first violation of the academic integrity policy will carry a minimum penalty of a failing grade on the assignment. A second violation will carry a minimum penalty of a failing grade for the course. The most severe penalty for a violation of the academic integrity policy is expulsion from the university. If you have questions about the limits of academic integrity in specific circumstances, please ask me. I am here to help you succeed. But academic dishonesty will not be tolerated.

MATERIALS:

The following texts are *required* and are available for purchase in the bookstore.

Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Treatise on Happiness*. Trans. Oesterle. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983. (Excerpted from the *Summa Theologiae*.)
Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Irwin. 2nd ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999.
Augustine, St. *Confessions*. Trans. Pine-Coffin. New York: Penguin Books, 1961.
Myers, David. *The Pursuit of Happiness*. New York: Avon Books, 1992.
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Kaufmann and Hollingdale. In *On*

the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo. Ed. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1989.

SCHEDULE:

Reading assignments are due on Tuesdays of each week. If a pop quiz is given on a particular reading assignment, it will be administered at the beginning of class on the day the assignment is due. Tuesday classes will usually begin with 10-15 minutes of small group discussion facilitated by the individuals assigned to prepare discussion questions for that day. Small groups will then share their questions with the entire class, and the remainder of the meeting will be devoted to large group discussion of the questions. Thursday meetings will be comprised primarily of lecture on the week’s text, although the professor will often lead “guided” discussion exercises at the end of these sessions.

Date	Reading Due	Written Assignment Due
T, 1/16	Unit 1: Imagining Life with Purpose Introductory Comments: The Fundamental Question <i>Simon Birch</i>	
TH, 1/18	<i>Simon Birch</i> , cont.	
T, 1/23	<i>Confessions</i> , bks. 1-6	Discussion Questions, Group A
TH, 1/25		
T, 1/30	<i>Confessions</i> , bks. 7-9	Discussion Questions, Group B
TH, 2/1		
T, 2/6	Unit 2: Classical and Christian Conceptions of the Highest Good <i>The Last Samurai</i>	
TH, 2/8	<i>The Last Samurai</i> , cont.	
T, 2/13	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , bk. 1	Discussion Questions, Group C
TH, 2/15		**Personal Confessions**
T, 2/20	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , bks. 2-5	Discussion Questions, Group D
TH, 2/22		
T, 2/27	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , bks. 6-7	Discussion Questions, Group E
TH, 3/1		
T, 3/6	***No Class*** (Midterm Break)	
TH, 3/8	***No Class*** (Midterm Break)	

T, 3/13	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , bks. 8-9	Discussion Questions, Group F
TH, 3/16		
T, 3/20	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , bk. 10	Discussion Questions, Group A
TH, 3/22		
T, 3/27	<i>Treatise on Happiness</i> , qq. 1-3 (<i>Summa Theologiae</i> I-II, 1-3)	Discussion Questions, Group B
TH, 3/29		
T, 4/3	Unit 3: A Critique of the Notion of a Highest Good <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , Nietzsche's Preface & Essay 1	Discussion Questions, Group C
TH, 4/5	***No Class*** (Easter Break)	
T, 4/10	<i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , Essay 2	Discussion Questions, Group D
TH, 4/12		
T, 4/17	<i>Wall Street</i>	
TH, 4/19	<i>Wall Street</i> , cont.	
T, 4/24	Unit 4: Positive Psychology—A Science of Happiness? <i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i> , pp. 15-104	Discussion Questions, Group E
TH, 4/26		
T, 5/1	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i> , pp. 105-207	Discussion Questions, Group F
TH, 5/3		**Letters from Nietzsche**
TBA		**Final Exam**