The Good Life (HNRS 2010)

Course Description

Plato writes in Apology that at the trial that led to his death, Socrates remarked, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” In this course, we will take up Socrates’ implicit challenge to all of us: to think about the nature of the good life. What is desirable for human beings, and can we achieve it? Is the best life one of pleasure, rational reflection, religious devotion, self-actualization, social engagement, or some combination of them?

Philosophers from different eras and cultures have offered their own visions of the good life. We will explore competing conceptions of the good life through reading and discussing primary texts, including but not limited to authors such as Laozi, Plato, Aristotle, Dostoyevsky, Rousseau, Emerson, Nietzsche, and Marx.

Learning Outcomes

Foundational Principles
1) We believe the arts and humanities play a fundamental role as tools for the analysis, interpretation, creation, and expression of human ideals, challenges, and desires across cultures.

2) Perspectives from the arts and humanities apply to other academic disciplines and to society at large.

3) We value open inquiry into complex problems, and the ability to reflect on, analyze, and appreciate diverse viewpoints and schools of thought.

Humanities General Education Student Learning Outcomes
1) Students will demonstrate knowledge of diverse philosophical, communicative, linguistic, and literary traditions, as well as of key themes, concepts, issues, terminology, and ethical standards in humanities disciplines.

2) Students will analyze cultural artifacts within a given discipline, and, when appropriate, across disciplines, time periods, and cultures.

3) Students will demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate their understanding of humanities materials in written, oral, or graphic forms.
Course Materials


Both books are available at the WSU bookstore (or on Amazon). All other readings will be provided through Canvas.

Course Policies
Each week of the course has a set of readings, a discussion prompt, and two short quizzes. As you'll see, I've usually put the readings as "due" on Tuesdays and Thursdays. What that means is that you'll need to have the readings done by class time so that when I lecture, I'll be making connections to concepts you've already encountered. To get discussion started, I also ask you to write up a short piece before each class on whatever you found interesting.

No laptops in the classroom! Here's why. [Link (Links to an external site.)](#) There are also studies that show that students retain knowledge better when they have to write it out; my unscientific guess is that slowing yourself down and thinking about what's important in the lecture helps retention. In any case, the slides are provided for you on Canvas, so you shouldn't feel like you have to try to take dictation in order to keep up with the lecture. If you need a laptop for some reason, please sit in the last two rows.

I expect all work to be performed in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct. This means the following: first, that you are to be the sole author of your own work; second, all exams will be closed note except where specified and closed book and must be completed on your own. Violations of the Code will be punished severely, up to and including receiving a failing grade for the class. In addition, I will submit the name of any violator to the Dean of Students office. If you have any questions about the Code, please ask.

Any students requiring accommodations or services due to a disability must contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in room 181 of the Student Service Center. SSD can also arrange to provide course materials (including this syllabus) in alternative formats if necessary.

WSU recognizes that there are times when course content may differ from a student's core beliefs. Faculty, however, have a responsibility to teach content that is related to the discipline and that has a reasonable relationship to pedagogical goals. If you, as a student, believe that the content of the course conflicts with your ability to pursue the topic, you may request a resolution from the instructor, with the understanding that the instructor may or may not make an accommodation.

If the University is forced to close for any reason during the semester, please check the course Canvas page and your Weber email for updates on how this course will proceed. The University announces
closures and other emergencies through its Code Purple emergency alert system. Students are encouraged to sign up for Code Purple: [http://www.weber.edu/codepurple/](http://www.weber.edu/codepurple/) (Links to an external site.).

**Evaluation**

Readings and Journals (5 pts per class):

- Before every class, write up a ~250 word response to the readings for the day. You can use this in whatever way you find helpful; I’ve suggested prompts for most readings, but you should write on whatever you would like to discuss.
- Because I use these to help guide our class time, no late journals will be accepted. I will, however, drop two.

Papers (100 pts each.)

- During the semester you’ll write three 1500 word papers on topics that have to do with the material. I’ll provide prompts, but you’ll also be free to create your own topic (with my approval.)
- The class before the due dates for the first two papers will be open days where you can peer review each other’s drafts and talk through your paper ideas.

Presentation (20 points each.)

- Twice, you and a partner will be responsible for leading the day’s discussion. I’ve already picked the readings for you, but how you choose to guide your classmates through the material will be entirely up to you. You might stick to coming up with questions to guide the discussion, but you could feel free to introduce a video, or an activity. Whatever you like! This is your class.
- In the second week of class you’ll sign up for times. You’ll have to present once before the end of October and then a second time before the end of the semester.
- To prepare appropriately for the class, you and your partner will need to meet with me before hand. This gives you a chance to run your plan by me, and/or ask me any questions you had about the reading. We’ll aim to do this during my office hours the day before your session. (If we can’t meet then, we’ll work out another time.

**Contact Information**

Dr. Mary Beth Willard  
Department of Political Science and Philosophy  
Weber State University  
SS 258  
(801) 626-6994 (this is the department number; you'll end up speaking to our secretary, Debbie Strait.)
Best ways to contact me:
  - Through the Canvas mailbox (give me 24 hours to respond)
  - Through e-mail at marybethwillard@weber.edu (same)

Office Hours:
Mondays and Wednesdays from 10-noon. No appointment needed, but if you're planning to come in, drop me an e-mail so I know to expect you. If you can't make those times, contact me, and we'll work out an alternate time to meet.

Syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thu Sep 3, 2015</td>
<td><strong>Readings and Journal #1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Camus Myth of Sisyphus.pdf (pp. 4-21, and pp. 75-78)</td>
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<td>Tue Sep 8, 2015</td>
<td><strong>Readings and Journal #2</strong></td>
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<td>• Philebus (excerpts): Philebus - excerpt.docx</td>
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<td>• HedonicAdaptation.pdf</td>
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<td>• William James, &quot;The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness (in Guignon)</td>
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<td>Thu Sep 17, 2015</td>
<td><strong>Readings and Journal #5</strong></td>
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<td>• Kupperman, ch. 2</td>
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<td>Watch:</td>
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<td>• Martin Seligman On the State of Psychology</td>
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<td>• Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi on Flow</td>
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Readings and Journal #6

Tue Sep 22, 2015

- Nietzsche - Excerpt from The Gay Science
- The Paradox of Choice

Readings and Journal #7

Thu Sep 24, 2015

- Plato, Republic (in Guignon)
- Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics (in Guignon)

Readings and Journal #8

Tue Sep 29, 2015

- Kupperman, ch. 3
- Suits, Ch. 1, "The Death of the Grasshopper" The Grasshopper

Readings and Journal #9

Thu Oct 1, 2015

- Lucretius, On The Order of Things (mild sexual content), in Guignon.

Mon Oct 5, 2015

First Paper

Readings and Journal #10

Thu Oct 8, 2015

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching (in Guignon)
- Chuang-Tzu CookTing.docx
- Suits, Ch. 2, "The Death of the Grasshopper" The Grasshopper

Readings and Journal #11

Tue Oct 13, 2015

- Kupperman, ch. 4

Readings and Journal #12

Thu Oct 15, 2015

- Descartes, Rene, The Passions of the Soul (in Guignon.)
- Spinoza, The Ethics (in Guignon.)

Readings and Journal #13

Tue Oct 20, 2015

- Russell, The Conquest of Happiness (in Guignon)
• Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach To Ethics.* (in Guignon)

**Thu Oct 22, 2015**

• Kupperman, ch. 5

**Readings and Journal #14**

**Tue Oct 27, 2015**

• Suits, *The Grasshopper, ch. 3*

• Bradford, *The Value of Achievements*

**Readings and Journal #15**

**Thu Oct 29, 2015**

• *The Analects of Confucius, intro and book I-book VIII.*
  

  **Presentation #1**

  **Readings and Journal #16**

  **Tue Nov 3, 2015**


  **Readings and Journal #17**

  **Thu Nov 5, 2015**

  • Dostoyevsky, "The Russian Monk" (in Guignon)

  **Mon Nov 9, 2015**

  **Second Paper**

  **Readings and Journal #18**

  **Tue Nov 10, 2015**

  • Kupperman, ch. 6

  **Readings and Journal #19**

  **Thu Nov 12, 2015**

  • Plato, *Crito* [Link](#)

  • Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

  **Readings and Journal #20**

  **Tue Nov 17, 2015**

  • Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance", (in Guignon)

  **Readings and Journal #21**
• Marx, Karl. "Alienated Labor" (in Guignon)

Readings and Journal #22

Thu Nov 19, 2015
• Sartre, *Existentialism as a Humanism*
• De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (in Guignon)

Readings and Journal #23

Tue Nov 24, 2015
• Buber, "The Way of Man, According to the Teachings of Hasidism", (in Guignon)
• MacIntyre, "The Virtues, The Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition" (in Guignon)

Readings and Journal #24

Tue Dec 1, 2015
• W.E.B. DuBois, "Of our spiritual strivings" (in Guignon)
• Another reading: TBD.

Readings and Journal #25

Thu Dec 3, 2015
• Kupperman, ch. 7

Readings and Journal #26

Tue Dec 8, 2015
• Plato, *Apology*. [link](#)

Presentation #2

Sat Dec 12, 2015  Third Paper