

**College of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Department of Philosophy**  
**Meaning, Purpose, and the Good Life**

Location:	Welcome to the class. According to Aristotle, philosophy begins with wonder. I hope that this course serves to deepen your sense of wonder in the world. More importantly, I hope that you learn to love wisdom—which is the essence of philosophy—and that our discussions stay with you long after the class ends. As Plato says, the end of education is a whole, complete, person. I'm glad you decided to take this class.
Instructor: Dr. Mark Bernier	
Office:	
E-mail:	
Phone:	
Office hours:	
Technical support:	

**Response time:** instructor responds to emails usually within 48 hours (except weekends)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION** From website: Nature, methods and some of the main problems of philosophy. Primarily for freshmen and sophomores. Not a prerequisite for advanced courses. One or more sections may be offered in any online format.

**COURSE TEXTS (REQUIRED)**

- Plato: *The Republic* (trans. Grube & Reeve. Hackett Publishing, 2nd ed.)
- Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling* (trans. Sylvia Walsh. Cambridge University Press. 2006)
- Viktor Frankl: *Man's Search for Meaning* (trans. Ilse Lasch. Beacon Press, 4th ed.)
- Epictetus: *A Manual for Living* (ed./trans. Sharon Lebell. Harper/Collins, 1994)
- Jonathan Lear: *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Harvard, paperback 2008)

(Other texts will be supplied as needed)

**REQUIREMENTS**

- **Two exams:** 30% each.
- **One paper:** 25%.
- **Participation:** 15%. This includes: attendance, quizzes, in-class writing, and *quality* contribution to discussion in class.
  - Note 1: part of your participation grade -- 5% -- will be based on a short (5 minute) presentation on the reading for a particular day. You must (a) summarize some main points of the reading, and (b) provide 3 questions to the class to generate discussion.
  - Note 2: This is a *discussion-driven class*, which means that you are expected to be prepared for — discussion. You must do the reading, be ready for short quizzes, be ready to answer questions, or (more important) come with your own questions.

- Note 3: Extra Credit (up to 5%) is available for anyone who desires to turn in additional work, such as written reflections on the readings, *outstanding* preparation for and participation in class discussion, or other work jointly agreed upon between student and instructor.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES** These are the course objectives I have for you:

- To improve critical thinking skills; and develop and improve the ability to write a clear, thoughtful, and organized philosophy paper
- To understand (and appreciate!) central texts in the history of philosophy

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS (SUBJECT TO REVISION: THIS IS A DISCUSSION DRIVEN CLASS)

### WEEK ONE

No readings / Introduction / What is philosophy? History, Tools, etc.

### WEEK TWO

#### HAPPINESS AND THE GOOD LIFE

☞ What do education, society, the arts, marriage, family, good rulers, knowledge, and most importantly, *living a moral life*, have to do with happiness?

**Tuesday** reading: Plato. *Republic*. Bk I (all); Bk II: 357a-362c

Introducing Plato's *Republic*, the people, main issue: what is justice, and is it better to be just? Is it better to be a just person than an unjust person? The challenge given: is a bad (unjust) person better off, even happier, than a good (just) person? The One Ring!

**Thursday** Plato. *Republic*. Bk II: 368c-376c; Bk III: 412b-end; Bk IV: 419-422a

What makes a city good? The growth of the city, its rulers, and why the rulers cannot be wealthy

### WEEK THREE

**Tuesday**: Plato. *Republic*: Bk IV: 427d-end

Finally: Justice! The parts & virtues of the city and the human soul

**Thursday**: Plato. *Republic*: Bk II: 376c-end; Bk III: 386a-402a

The importance of the arts: Education; Censorship; The dangers of Imitation

### WEEK FOUR

**Tuesday**: Plato. *Republic*. Bk V: 457a-462d

Government regulated breeding and marriages

**Thursday**: Plato. *Republic*. Bk VI: 505e-509c; Bk VII: 514a-526e, 540-end

The metaphysics & epistemology of a good education: The Cave

### WEEK FIVE

**Tuesday**: Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (class file) Book I (all of it); Book II (all of it); Book VII (11-14); Book VIII (1-3); Book IX (9-12)

What is happiness? What is necessary for it? How does being virtuous relate to happiness? And is friendship necessary for happiness?

**Thursday**: Aristotle (continued)

### WEEK SIX

**Tuesday**: Epicurus (class file)

Pleasure as constituting the Happiness of life

**Thursday:** Epictetus. *Manual for Living*.

Why our external commitments and hopes are the cause of misery and unhappiness. What is happiness? What should we depend on for it?

### WEEK SEVEN

**Tuesday** Kant (class file)

A critique of the ancient view. How does happiness relate to the moral life? What is Kant's view of ethics? What is the highest good? What may we hope?

**Thursday** Kant (continued)

### WEEK EIGHT

**Tuesday** Lear. *Radical Hope*

On the loss of the good life

**Thursday** Lear (continued)

### WEEK NINE

**Tuesday:** Review / Catch-up

## THURSDAY: FIRST EXAM

### WEEK TEN

## MEANING AND PURPOSE

☞ Can life have meaning without happiness? Where could we find meaning? How does faith relate to meaning, happiness, and the moral life? Is meaning possible?

**Tuesday:** Leo Tolstoy *My Confession* (class file)

Raising central questions of meaning

**Thursday** Albert Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus* (class file)

Existence has no meaning, so why no suicide? Can we still be happy?

### WEEK ELEVEN

**Tuesday:** Richard Taylor: "The Meaning of Human Existence" (class file)

**Thursday:** Nagel: "Death" (class file)

### WEEK TWELVE

**Tuesday:** Viktor Frankl: *Man's Search for Meaning*. Read: Part One: Experiences in a Concentration Camp

Life can have meaning. But can we have this without happiness? How do we secure meaning?

**Thursday** Frankl (continued)

### WEEK THIRTEEN

**Tuesday:** Erik Wielenberg, "God and the Meaning of Life" (class file)

**Thursday:** Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*: Read: Preface, Tuning Up, A tribute to Abraham

How does faith relate to meaning, happiness and the moral life? What is faith? What can Abraham show us about faith?

#### WEEK FOURTEEN

**Tuesday:** Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*: Read: Problems - A Preliminary Outpouring from the Heart  
The Knights of Resignation and Faith! The boy and the princess

**Thursday:** Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*: Read: Problem I: Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical? (read through page 52). Read: Problem II: Is there an absolute duty to God? (read only the first paragraph)

The paradoxical relationship between faith and the ethical

#### WEEK FIFTEEN

**Tuesday:** Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling*: wrapping up

**Thursday:** Final Reflections

#### FINAL EXAM