

**HAPPINESS AND UTOPIA:
THINKING ABOUT THE IDEAL LIFE**
PHIL 4565-01 Spring 2023

INSTRUCTOR: MICAH LOTT micah.lott@bc.edu

OFFICE HOURS: Tues 1:30-2:30pm & by appointment

COURSE TIME AND LOCATION: Tues / Thurs 10:30-11:45am (Stokes 401N).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the notion of an ideal human life, understood as living well in ideal circumstances. This notion is at once familiar and puzzling. On the one hand, we all have some conception of living well - i.e., happiness, flourishing, the good life. And we recognize some circumstances as inimical to human flourishing, such as conditions of famine, poverty, oppression, and exploitation. Moreover, we seem to operate with some idea of good circumstances whenever we wish good fortune for our loved ones, or whenever we work to make our societies more supportive of human well-being. But on closer inspection, the notion of ideal circumstances raises a number of questions. What would human life look like in utopian conditions? Would humans still work and labor, or would we pass our lives entirely in leisure? Could our lives still have meaning and purpose, if there were nothing in our circumstances to struggle against? Would we still need virtues like courage and perseverance, with nothing to fear or overcome? And what about death: is it the ultimate non-ideal circumstance that might be overcome in some future utopia? This course considers such questions in relation to the notion of an ideal human life. We will read a range of philosophical and literary texts, including works by Aristotle, Thomas More, Sigmund Freud, Aldous Huxley, and Susan Wolf.

TEXTS

The following texts are required and available in the BC bookstore. Please purchase the translations/editions available in the bookstore. I strongly encourage you to get a *physical copy* of all the texts. You will need to bring a copy of reading to class each day (see policy on electronics below).

- ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Trans. Reeve: Hackett)
- MORE, *Utopia*
- SUITS, *The Grasshopper*
- WOLF, *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*
- FREUD, *Civilization and its Discontents*
- HUXLEY, *Brave New World*
- CAPEK, *Four Plays*
- O'CONNELL, *To be a Machine*

Shorter readings will be made available via Canvas.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

D) ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION. If you choose to take this class, it is mandatory to attend and participate actively. This course is designed to be rich in discussion, and you will be expected to offer comments and questions on the readings. There is a lot of reading, and much of it is fairly dense. If

you are looking for a straight lecture where you sit back and take notes, this is not the class for you!

II) ASSIGNMENTS:

- First writing assignment: short answer (about 5 pages: 20% of final grade)
- Second writing assignment: short answer (about 5 pages: 20% of final grade)
- Third writing assignment: short answer (about 5 pages: 20% of final grade)
- Final assignment (40% of final grade)

GRADING

You will receive both letter and numerical grade. Numerical and letter grades correspond as follows:

A 94 – 100	A- 90 – 93.99		
B+ 87 – 89.99	B 84 – 86.99	B- 80 – 83.99	
C+ 77 – 79.99	C 74 – 76.99	C- 70 – 73.99	
D+ 67 – 69.99	D 64 – 66.99	D- 60 – 63.99	F = <60

ELECTRONICS

All electronic devices should be switched to silent mode before coming to class. Because laptops and smart phones tend to be a distraction and an impediment to discussion, their use is strictly prohibited. I repeat: NO LAPTOPS OR PHONES! If you have an electronic device that can function simply *as a reading device* – i.e., a tablet of some sort, Kindle, iPad, etc. – then you may bring that to class to function as your copy of the text. (But please do *not* bring keyboard to turn your tablet into a quasi-laptop).

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is forbidden. Plagiarism undermines the enterprise of learning. It is dishonest. It is disrespectful to your fellow students, to your instructor, and to yourself. Do not plagiarize. For penalties and guidelines, please see the BC website. If academic dishonesty is proven, this will result in disciplinary consequences. If you are tempted to plagiarize because you are in crisis, it is always better to speak to the professor, your advisor, the academic deans, the counseling center, or another trusted authority on campus who can help you handle the crisis.

A Note on Robots

Advances in artificial intelligence (e.g. ChatGPT) are providing new ways for people to outsource their academic tasks, and to deceptively pass off someone else's work as their own. For the purposes of this course, do *not* use ChatGPT or any other robot to complete your assignments. Any evidence that you have used such a tool, or borrowed words or phrases from such a tool, will be regarded as plagiarism.

Given the nature of your assignments, I doubt you would find a robot very helpful. But in any case, the use of AI tools to complete assignments undermines the whole point of this class, which is for *you* to learn, to analyze, to interpret, and to work through ideas and arguments *for yourself*. If you're not interested in doing the work for this class on your own, please don't take this class. If you do take this class, the your written work must be your own – i.e., *your own words, phrases, sentences, arguments*.

SPECIAL CONCERNS

If you have any questions or concerns – including any concerns related to a disability or special need – please feel free to speak with me or email me. I am happy to make accommodations. I want all of you to be able to learn in a safe, comfortable environment. If you require any accommodation, speak to me at the *beginning* of the term. Do not wait till assignments are due to bring this to my attention.

The Disability Services Office is available to empower students with any kind of disability:

<https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/dean-of-students/disability-services.html>

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

I will be following the BC health guidelines concerning vaccination, masks, social distancing, hand-washing, etc. I expect all of you do the same. Let us keep in mind that following these measures is a way of taking personal and social responsibility. It is also a way of demonstrating solidarity with vulnerable and at-risk members of our society.

If you are dealing with illness but are well enough to come to class, please consider *wearing a mask* as a courtesy to me and your fellow students – especially if you are coughing. This is an easy practice for us all to adopt, and it will promote a healthier environment for all of us.

TITLE IX AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

In the event that you choose to write or speak about having survived sexualized violence, including rape, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, Boston College policies require that, as your instructor, I share this information with Melinda Stoops, Boston College's Title IX Coordinator for students. Melinda will contact you to let you know about accommodations and support services at Boston College as well as options for holding accountable the person who harmed you. You are not required to speak with her.

If you do not want the Title IX Coordinator notified, instead of disclosing this information to me, you can speak confidentially with the following people on campus and in the community. They can connect you with support services and help explore your options now, or in the future:

- BC's Sexual Assault Network, available 24/7 at 617-552-2211
- University Counseling Services at 617-552-3310
- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC), available 24/7 at 800-841-8371
- Fenway Health, a LGBTQ+ focused care center, available at 617-927-6250

MORE CAMPUS RESOURCES

If you are feeling stressed, having challenges managing your time, sleep, or making choices around alcohol and food, the Office of Health Promotion (OHP) offers Individual and Group Health Coaching appointments with a trained Health Coach. Please reach out by visiting the Health Promotion website: <https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/health-promotion.html>

The Women's Center is open to all students, offering information about a range of topics (including sexual assault, health, and body relationship) and support. Located in Maloney 44. <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/womens-center.html>

The Thea Bowman AHANA and Intercultural Center supports the undergraduate community—with a particular focus on AHANA (people of African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American descent), multicultural, multiracial, and OTE (Options Through Education) students—in navigating college life and fulfilling their potential. Located in Maloney 45.

<https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/ahana.html>

LGBT+ Support: The Office of Student Outreach and Support Services supports gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning students and their allies by providing individual support and connecting them with campus support services. Please visit the website and check out LGBT+ mentoring programs, clubs, and events.

<https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/student-outreach-and-support-services/lgbtq-support.html>

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

NB: EACH READING IS TO BE COMPLETED **BEFORE** CLASS ON THE DAY IT IS LISTED.

PART I: ARISTOTLE AND LIVING WELL: *EUDAIMONIA*, EXCELLENCE, AND LEISURE

Tue 1/17

- Introduction to course themes and structure

- *Eudaimonia*, the final end, the good life; good living (i.e., living well) and good lives; activity vs passivity; focal activities as defining kinds of life; happiness, well-being, meaning, success
- The circumstances or environment of human lives: good vs bad circumstances in which you might find yourself; utopian ideals; instrumentally vs. intrinsically valuable activities; work vs leisure; constrained vs free activity; puzzles about utopia

- Bellamy *Looking Backward* (1888); selection from Mr Barton's sermon, Chapter XXVI

Thurs 1/19

Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1-5 & 7 & *Politics* I.1-2

Tues 1/24

Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* I.8-10

Seneca "On the Happy Life" Sections 1-8 & 16

Thurs 1/26

Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.5, X.6-X.8 and passages on leisure (σχολή, scholē) from *Politics*

PART II: MORE'S UTOPIA

Tue 1/31

More *Utopia* Preface (Letter to Giles) & book I

Thurs 2/2

More *Utopia* Book II

PART III: GAMES, LIFE, AND UTOPIA: *THE GRASSHOPPER*

Tue 2/7

Suits *The Grasshopper* chapters 1-13

Thurs 2/9

Suits *The Grasshopper* chapters 14 & 15

PART IV: MEANING IN LIFE: WOLF AND COMMENTATORS

Tues 2/14

Wolf "Meaning in Life" & "Why it Matters" (pgs 1-63)

Thurs 2/16

Comments by Commentators and Wolf's response (pgs 67-132)

++ First writing assignment due 2/17 ++

PART VII: VIRTUE, VICE, AND DEEP HAPPINESS: FOOT AND LAWRENCE

Tues 2/21

Foot *Natural Goodness* chapter 6: “Happiness and Human Good”

Thurs 2/23

Lawrence “The Deep and the Shallow”

Tues 2/28

Lawrence “The Deep and the Shallow” continued

Thurs 3/2

TBD

3/6 – 3/10: BC Spring Break

PART V: SKEPTICISM ABOUT UTOPIA: BERLIN AND VALUE PLURALISM

Tues 3/14

Berlin “The Pursuit of the Ideal”

Thurs 3/16

Berlin “The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West”

PART VI: SKEPTICISM ABOUT UTOPIA: FREUD’S *CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS*

Tues 3/21

Freud *Civilization and its Discontents*, Sections 1-6

Thurs 3/23

Freud *Civilization and its Discontents*, Sections 7-8

PART V: A MODERN DISTOPIA: HUXLEY’S *BRAVE NEW WORLD*

Tues 3/28

Whole book: Please read the *entire* novel prior to this class period!

Thurs/30

Huxley continued

++ Second Writing Assignment due 3/31 ++

PART VII: WORK, TECHNOLOGY, EFFORT

Tues 4/4

James “The Moral Equivalent of War”

Thurs 4/6

NO CLASS – Easter Holiday

Tues 4/11

Bastani *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*, short selections

Orwell *The Road to Wigan Pier* chapter XII

Thurs 4/13

Film: *Free Solo* (watch *prior* to class and come ready to discuss)

Tues 4/18

NO CLASS – BC Monday Schedule

Thurs 4/20

Capek, *R.U.R* (entire play)

PART VIII: TESTING THE LIMITS: LIFE, DEATH, AND IMMORTALITY

Tue 4/25

O’Connell *To Be a Machine*

Thurs 4/27

O’Connell *To Be a Machine* continued

Tues 5/2

Capek, *The Makropulos Case* (entire play)

Thurs 5/4

Seneca “The Shortness of Life”

+ + Third Writing Assignment Due 5/3++

+ + Final Assignment Due 5/12++