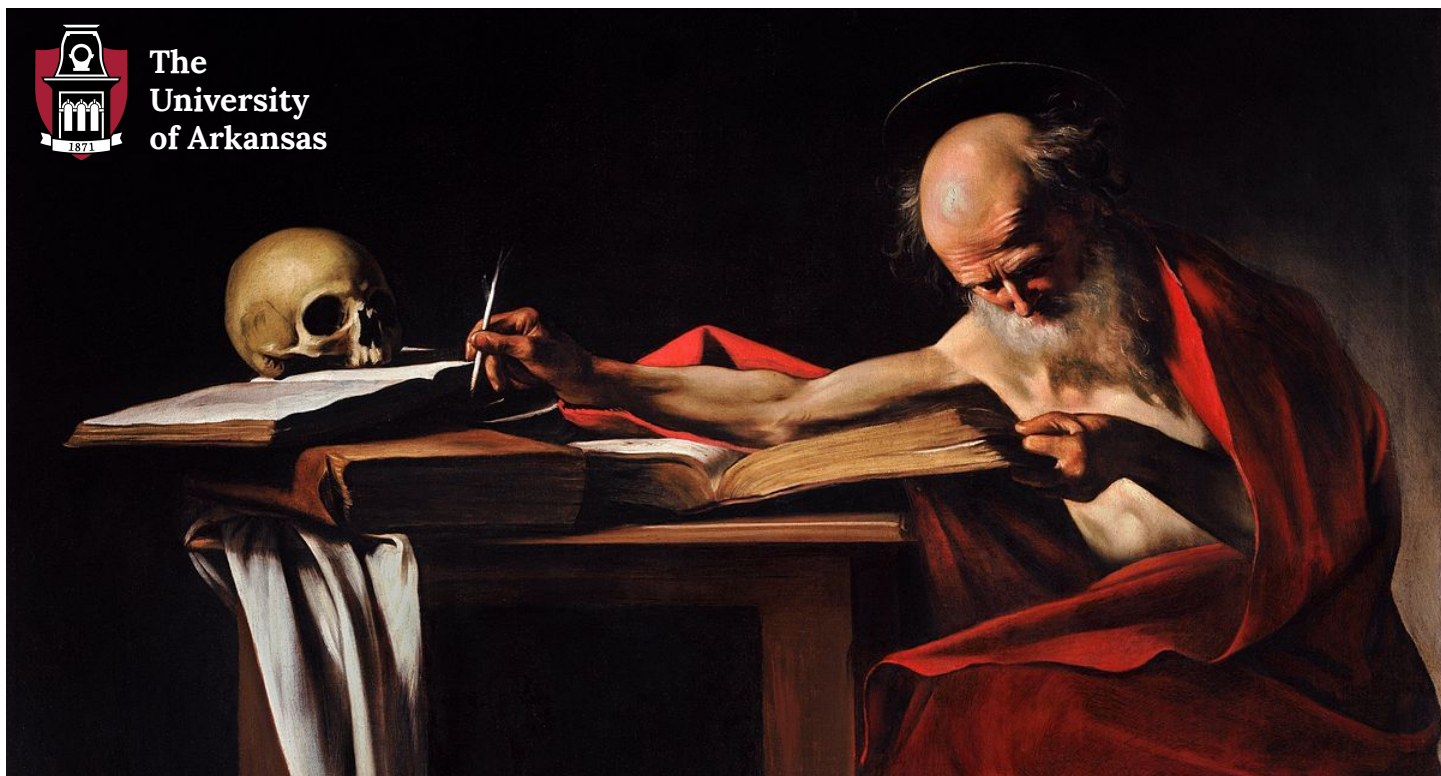


Human Nature and the Meaning of Life



The University of Arkansas



PHIL 2303
Old Main 0206

“Philosophies of Life and Death”
MWF 8:35–9:25am Spring 2020

A.G. Holdier [he/him]
aholdier@uark.edu
agholdier.com

Office Hours
MWF 9:30–10:30 and
by appointment

*I will typically be on floor three
Old Main for OH*

What’s in the Syllabus?

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of

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Grade Items

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Coursework:	40%
<i>In-class:</i>	<i>20%</i>
<i>Read Resp’s:</i>	<i>20%</i>
Art Paper:	10%
Term Paper:	20%
Exam 1:	15%
Exam 2:	15%

Important Dates

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Papers Due

Short Paper: March 13
Final Paper: May 6

Exam Dates

#1: February 24
#2: April 29

Course Thesis



At the end of this course, you will effectively be able to explain and defend the following course thesis, which will reappear at every class meeting:

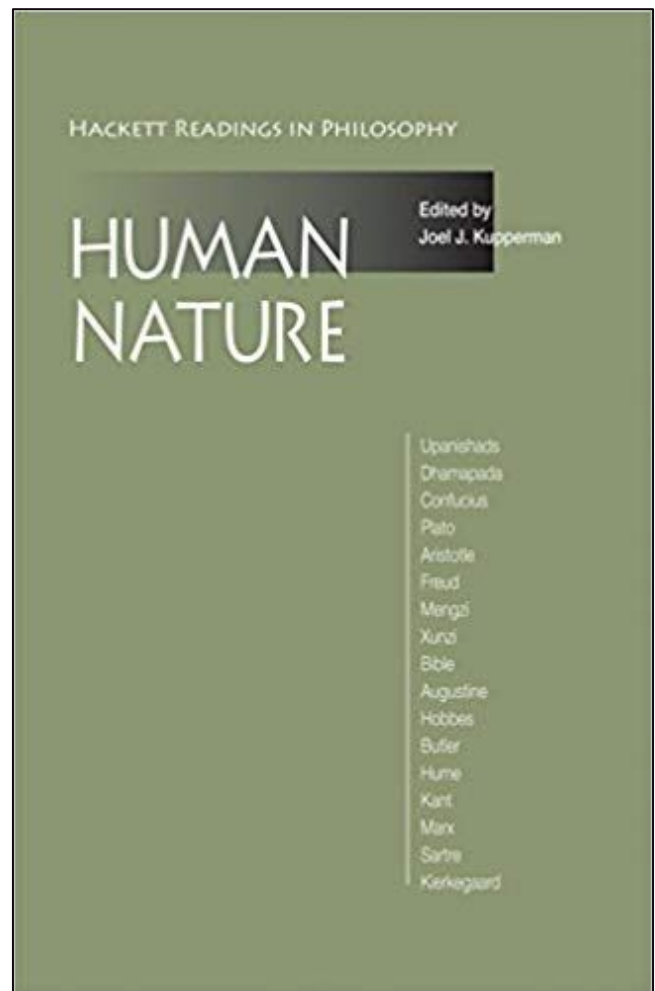
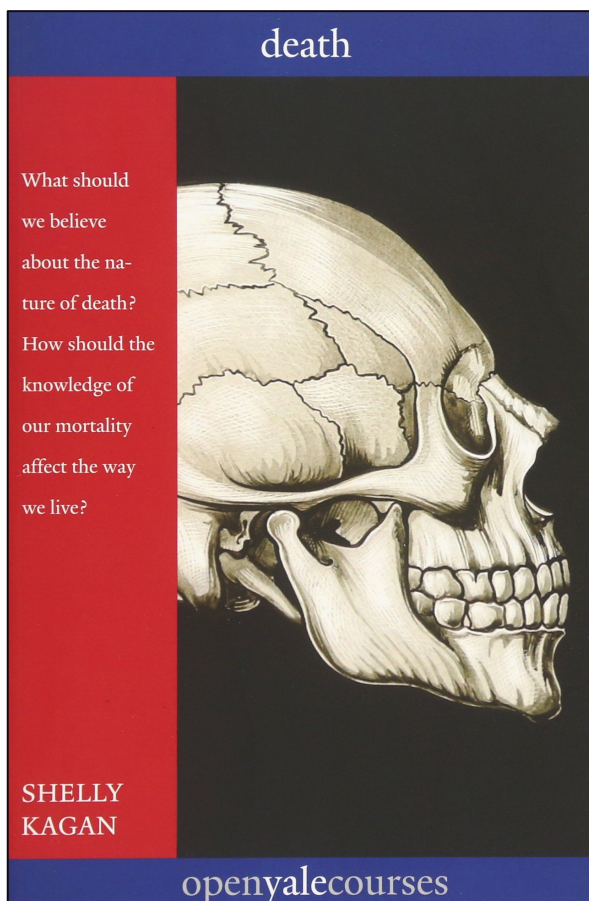
Socrates famously called philosophy “training for dying” - we can analyze this claim by considering ontological, axiological, and existential questions about what it means to be human. “Philosophies of Life and Death” promotes the interdisciplinary, cross-cultural exploration of these topics from multiple perspectives.

Required Texts



In addition to selections that will be available on Blackboard, our course requires two books

Death, by Shelley Kagan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012)



Human Nature: A Reader, ed. Joel J. Kupperman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2012)

Course Objectives



<p>Identify fundamental concepts, structures, themes, and principles related to human nature and theories on the meaning of life.</p>	<p>Analyze and interpret texts, songs, images, movies, television shows, and/or other media from multiple historical, intellectual, and cultural perspectives.</p>
<p>Demonstrate facility with recognized principles of hermeneutics and analytic reasoning to interpret philosophical theories on human nature and the meaning of life.</p>	<p>Evaluate ontological, axiological, moral, and existential claims for their cohesiveness within variable cultural and historical perspectives.</p>

Grading Items



Coursework 40%		Exams 30%		Papers 30%	
In-class Work 20%	Reading Responses 20%	Exam 1 15% (on 2/24)	Exam 2 15% (on 4/29)	Art Paper 10% (d. 3/13)	Term Paper 20% (due 5/06)



Blackboard

In addition to posting announcements and grades, this course will use Blackboard to provide materials and submit homework assignments.

- Please be familiar with <https://learn.uark.edu/>
- IT Assistance: <https://bbhelp.uark.edu/>

Grading Items



In addition to regular in-class assignments and two exams, you will have multiple Reading Responses and two Papers to complete over the course of this semester:

Reading Responses

(20% of Final Grade)

There will be a total of seven writing exercises to be completed and posted on Blackboard by 11:59 pm on **the Friday of the assigned week**. For each one, you need to briefly explain and then critically respond to no more than two of the readings from the previous two weeks. (What did you understand the author to be saying - particularly given our class discussion - and what do you think about it?) You may select to only respond to one reading if that response is long enough.

These will be between 250 and 500 words and will be graded on a scale from 0 to 3 as follows:

- 0 No work was submitted
- 1 Work was submitted, but there is insufficient connection to the material
- 2 Work shows that you thought about the material
- 3 Work shows that you thought about the material and have attended to class discussions.

At the end of the semester, one Reading Response grade will be dropped from your final grade.

(10% of Final Grade)

Art Paper

Imagine that you must demonstrate “human nature” to an alien unfamiliar with our species. For this assignment, you will select three artworks (songs, books, films, paintings, etc.) that you might use to show such an alien how humanity tends to understand itself and write a short paper of about 1000 words explaining your thought process. This paper will be uploaded to Blackboard by 11:59 pm on **Friday, March 13th** and will be graded on a standard A to F scale.

More information will be forthcoming in class.

Term Paper

(20% of Final Grade)

Several writing prompts will be provided later in the semester; you will select one and write a paper of about 2000 words, synthesizing the material in our course to answer the questions you choose. This will be uploaded to Blackboard by 10:00 am on **Wednesday, May 6th** and graded on a standard A to F scale.

More information will be forthcoming in class after Exam One.

Course Policies

Late Work

The window to submit Blackboard Assignments and Projects closes at 11:59 pm on the date of their deadlines. Because they can be submitted at any point up to those deadlines, a **10% late penalty** will apply for every day (or part-of-a-day) they are late, except in emergency cases. Planned absences do not qualify as ‘emergencies’.

Teaching Philosophy

As a student, it can be helpful to know where I’m coming from as your instructor and why I teach in the way that I do. Therefore, I am including a short statement of my teaching philosophy here. If you ever have more specific questions about why we are discussing something in the way that we do, please don’t hesitate to ask me.

In brief, I aim to foster active learning environments that support students in their continued philosophical growth, analyzing and applying relevant concepts from a contemporary perspective, in light of a historical conversation.

This vision is founded on three co-equal suppositions:

- All students, by nature, are capable of learning and motivated to do so.
- Education occurs more via empowerment and encouragement than impression and punishment.
- The role of the Teacher is to mediate and guide discussions, both in-class and out-of-class.

Accessibility

I’d like this class to be a great experience for all of you, and all of you are entitled to equal access to educational opportunities at the University of Arkansas. Disabled students are encouraged to speak with me if that would be helpful and to avail themselves of the services provided by the Center for Educational Access via 479-575-3104 or <http://cea.uark.edu>.

Technology

All philosophy courses involve engagement with the ideas of others, usually through written texts; in the 21st century, this includes a variety of digital media - something we will discuss repeatedly in our course. Being able to think critically about information, no matter the medium (electronic, spoken, written, etc.) is a crucial skill that our class aims to develop. For this reason (and others) I will frequently ask you to use technology in our course and I ask that you bring laptops, tablets, and/or phones with you to every class.

Wielding technology virtuously and temperately is another essential skill to possess. For this reason (and others) I will ask you to refrain from using your devices in ways that might distract yourself or others from the focus of our discussions.

Weather Policy

Though I do not expect this to be an issue of any significance, we will follow the official [University of Arkansas Inclement Weather Policy](#).

Attendance

Although your attendance at our thrice-weekly class meetings is expected, it will not directly affect your grade.

However, teaching yourself the course material without assistance from your peers and guidance from me will be far more difficult than regular class attendance. Furthermore, in-class assignments (which account for 20% of your final grade) **cannot** be redressed if missed. Our grading scale allows for five absences for any reason before your In-class work grade is negatively impacted. Put differently: your five lowest “In-class” grades will be dropped at the end of the course.

You are an adult with responsibilities; this class is one of them. I will do everything I can to ensure that our class time is engaging and, in return, I ask that you do your best to attend every class session possible.

Course Policies

Grading Scale

A+: 98-100	B: 80-86	D+: 67-69
A: 90-97	C+: 77-79	D: 60-66
B+: 87-89	C: 70-76	F: 0-59

Though some *might* arise in-class, **no regular extra-credit options are available** for this course.

The “\$#! Happens” Card

Exactly **one** time this semester, you can email me to invoke this clause on one assignment and receive a **three-day extension, no explanation required, no questions asked.** The extension will apply from the actual assignment deadline and extend for three calendar days. This can be used on any assignment EXCEPT for Exam One or Two.

Office Hours

In addition to irregular appointments in the graduate student offices in [the CENA building \(formerly Harmon Apartments\) at 110 N. Harmon St., #1](#), **I will hold regular office between 9:30 and 10:30 am on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the Philosophy Library on the third floor of Old Main.** If this does not work for your schedule, I encourage you to email me to set up another time; I am frequently around campus and available to meet, either at CENA, Old Main, or elsewhere. I strongly encourage you to visit my office hours at some point during the course session

Academic Misconduct

Academic dishonesty of any sort is a serious offense and will be handled per the official [University of Arkansas Academic Integrity Policy](#). Per that document ‘academic dishonesty’ is defined as: “any act by which a student gains or attempts to gain an academic advantage for him/herself or another by misrepresenting his/her or another’s work or by interfering with the independent completion, submission, or evaluation of academic work.” Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Copying another student’s assignment, quiz, or exam
- Using unauthorized electronic devices or materials during an exam or quiz or for an assignment
- Communicating answers for an assignment, exam, or quiz
- Offering one’s work to another person or presenting someone else’s work as your own
- Completing an assignment or taking an exam for another student, or having someone complete an assignment or exam for yourself (including contract cheating)
- Outsourcing assignments, quizzes, and exams to fellow students or third parties

If you have any questions about this, please contact me.

Helpful Campus Resources

The University of Arkansas is prepared for a wide range of needs, both emergency and otherwise. Please familiarize yourself with the following resources:

- [Academic support programs](#) available on campus, including links to specific services, hours, and locations.
- [Citation guidance](#) from the University Library
- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
- [Emergency Procedures](#) (including active shooter incidents, severe weather, fires, and others).
- [The RazAlert Notification System](#): a campus-wide alert system for hazardous conditions

Helpful Online Resources

The following are all quality (free!) resources for expanding your philosophical understanding:

- [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [The Philosophy Bites Podcast](#)
- [The Prindle Post](#)
- [The Examining Ethics Podcast](#)
- [The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [The Elucidations Podcast](#)
- [Hi-Phi Nation](#)
- [I Think, Therefore I Fan Podcast](#)
- [The Poststructuralist Tent Revival Podcast](#)

FAQs



Who are you?

Thanks for asking! I'm Anthony (A.G.) Holdier, a graduate student in philosophy here at the University of Arkansas. Until 2018, I was (something like) a theology teacher in rural Idaho and have a background in the philosophy of religion, but my research now focuses on questions about implicit cognition (the stuff that you don't notice that you notice) and how that affects our culpability. I'm in the process of applying to philosophy PhD programs and married to my much-wiser and much, *much* more reasonable partner, Jennifer; together, we have three children: Ellie (age 9), Audrey (age 7), and Tessa (age 2).

How is my grade calculated?

35% of your final grade is based on "Classroom Citizenship" (attendance + in-class activities), 10% from quizzes taken on Blackboard, 10% from a final test on the last day of class, and the other 45% is from three short papers (each worth 15%).

Can I use technology during class?

Yes. In fact, because all of our readings will be provided via Blackboard, I'll assume that most of you will bring your computers to our class meetings. We will frequently refer to the readings (as well as other pieces of digital media) in class and I'm happy to keep printing costs lower by simply using our devices.

However, I will respectfully ask that you only use technology as it is relevant to our classroom activities and not be distracted by non-course material during our class. Just as I may ask you to use your devices in class, I may ask you not to do so as well. I will do everything I can to ensure that our class time is engaging and, in return, I ask that you do your best to remain engaged for the duration of our time together.

What should I call you?

I prefer to be called Professor Holdier or, perhaps, Instructor Holdier. If you call me "Doctor," I'll be grateful, but I have not yet earned that privilege.

Fun Fact: you should **always** address your professors like this unless they specifically ask otherwise. When in doubt, it is never a bad idea to take the most professional posture possible. Never assume that someone's personal name is appropriate for you to use unless they have explicitly told you to do so.

Why are there so many assignments?

I have three main reasons for assigning the work as so in this course:

- 1) The writing assignments help to guide your thinking through our course content and prepare you to discuss the readings in class. Hopefully, they will help to make our conversations much more interesting and worthwhile.
- 2) They help to ensure that your grade is not based solely on several, monumental essays or tests. If you stay up-to-date on the assignments, then your grade will benefit along with your general philosophical understanding.
- 3) They encourage you to actually do the readings.

Related to this: **your first reading assignment is to read this entire syllabus.** If you've read this far, then you're about halfway there (and are off to a great start for this class)! To receive FULL credit for this assignment, find a 'philosophy meme' that makes you laugh, copy it into a .doc or .ppt file (or one of the other formats that Blackboard will accept), and submit it to the designated area in Blackboard.

FAQs



Can I eat and drink during class?

Sure, as long as you do so without making a distraction or a mess. (Bringing coffee to share is also always advisable!)

Do you take attendance?

The short answer: Kind of, but not really.

The longer answer: To keep a general idea of your engagement habits (as well as to better learn your names, initially) I do keep a basic tally of who is in attendance each day, but it does not directly impact your grade. *Indirectly*, however, absences will inhibit your ability to study and learn the material, as well as prevent your eligibility for submitting in-class assignments. There is no additional penalty for excessive absences and our grading scale allows for five absences for any reason before your grade for In-class work is negatively impacted.

What if I *have* to miss class?

You are an adult and I trust that you are capable of making informed decisions about your responsibilities and obligations. If other duties require you to be absent from class, I will not take it personally, nor will I expect an explanation from you; this syllabus is designed to be as clear as possible about how your final grade will be calculated so that you can adjust your schedule accordingly.

If you are unable to attend class, I recommend reviewing the materials posted on Blackboard and attending my office hours to discuss what you will certainly have missed. It is also a good idea to email me (especially if the absence is planned well in advance) so that we can plan accordingly.

Why does this class matter?

This is one of my favorite questions (and one that *almost everyone* thinks about, but very few people actually ask)! There are several reasons: firstly, you must pass this class to get the credits needed in order to eventually graduate from the University of Arkansas. More importantly, the reading, writing, and argumentative skills we will cultivate during our time together will be valuable tools for engaging, assessing, and making informed claims about all manner of material in your personal and professional lives. Plus, particularly since this is a course that's *literally* about *the meaning of life*, there should be something innately valuable recognized in the course content.

I've never taken a philosophy class before - will that be a problem?

Definitely not. In fact, I will assume that you haven't unless you mention otherwise. I *promise* you that you have nothing to worry about - philosophy classes may be weirder than others that you've taken, but it shouldn't be any more difficult.

Is there any extra credit?

Not in the usual sense. Though some "surprise assignments" *might* arise spontaneously in class (which is one more incentive to attend), there are no regular opportunities for loopholes you can exploit to simply tweak your grade.

Are the exams/assignments/projects difficult?

Not if you have paid attention in class and done the assigned readings. My goal with each deliverable is to test your knowledge of basic material from our discussions and readings - not to trick you or cause you pain.

FAQs



How do you grade the essays?

My goal with the essays is to test your ability to synthesize and apply the skills and methods of our class to new contexts, so I'm primarily interested in how you express and defend some interesting idea (with the guarantee that practically *any* idea can count as 'interesting.')

To help guide your writing process (and to clarify my expectations), a grading rubric is included alongside the assignment instructions. I encourage you to refer to this rubric before and after you draft your papers.

Why is there a classwork grade instead of a participation grade?

Not everyone learns in the same way or at the same pace; expecting (much less *requiring*) everyone to speak in class is unrealistic. Also, classroom participation is about much more than simply using your voice. Although verbal communication is a crucial skill to develop (and highly encouraged), physical cues (like posture, gestures, eye contact, etc.) are often just as important. Fortunately, classwork assignments allow for a more objective metric to measure course participation than simply my arbitrary memory of how often you speak up in class, as well as a grade record we can both track throughout the course.

How can I get the grade I want in this class?

By being both physically and mentally present in as many class meetings as possible, having done the readings and assignments on schedule. Students who are usually in class, usually paying attention, usually turning assignments in on time, and usually following the general flow of class conversations usually pass this course.

How should I contact you if I have a question about class?

Certainly, the best way to reach me is via my UArk email address (aholdier@uark.edu). I will do my best to respond to you within one day during the week, but I cannot promise a timely response to last-minute, emergency-type questions that come in just before deadlines, exams, etc. This is also the best way to schedule an appointment outside of my regular office hours.

Course Schedule



To focus your studies, I do not typically require you to read entire articles or chapters. Instead, for each day of class, we will discuss the pages listed on the chart below; you are always encouraged to read beyond the specified selection, but you will not be expected to do so.

Dates	Topic	Reading Assignments
Week One (1/14 - 1/17)	"Death" and "Human Nature"	"Human Nature Matters" (LINK) Upanishads (1st and 2nd Valli) Dhamapada (Ch. VI The Wise Man) The Bible: Genesis (Ch. 1 - 3) (LINK)
		Reading Response #1 is due in Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Friday, Jan. 17th

Dates (day of class)	Topic (focus of class)	Reading Assignments
Week Two (1/21 - 1/24)	Dualism and Physicalism	“Dualism and Physicalism” (Kagan, <i>Death</i> , Chapter 2)
Week Three (1/27 - 1/31)	Souls	Aquinas (ST1.75 - Question 75, Articles 1,2, and 4) (LINK) Aristotle (7 - An Account of the Human Good) “Arguments for the Existence of the Soul: Everyday Phenomena” (Kagan, <i>Death</i> , pp. 28-49)
Reading Response #2 is due in Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Friday, Jan. 31st		
Week Four (2/3 - 2/7)	Personal Identity	“Personal Identity” (Kagan, <i>Death</i> , Chapter 6) “Choosing Between the Theories: What Matters” (Kagan, <i>Death</i> , pp. 162-169)
Week Five (2/10 - 2/14)	Bodies	Selections from “Eating Meat and Eating People” (on BB) “Why be nonbinary?” (LINK) “The Gentle Seduction” (LINK)
Reading Response #3 is due in Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Friday, Feb. 14h		

Dates (day of class)	Topic (focus of class)	Reading Assignments
Week Six (2/17 - 2/21)	The Nature of Death and Suffering	“The Nature of Death” (Kagan, <i>Death</i> , Chapter 8) Schopenhauer, “On the Suffering of the World” (on BB)
Week Seven (2/24 - 2/28)	<p style="text-align: center;">Exam One will be on Monday, February 24th. Please bring one Blue Book.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">On Wednesday and Friday (Feb. 26th and 29th) we will not have a class meeting; I will be out of town at a conference.</p>	
Week Eight (3/2 - 3/6)	The Value of Life	<p style="text-align: center;">The Bible: Ecclesiastes (Ch. 1-2) (LINK) Dhamapada (Ch. II and III) “How to Be an Epicurean” (LINK)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“The Value of Life” (Kagan, <i>Death</i>, Chapter 12)</p>
Reading Response #4 is due in Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Friday, March 6th.		
Week Nine (3/9 - 3/13)	The Badness of Death	<p style="text-align: center;">“The Badness of Death” (Kagan, <i>Death</i>, Chapter 10)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“Immortality” (Kagan, <i>Death</i>, Chapter 11)</p>
Your Art Paper is due in Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Friday, March 13th.		

Dates (day of class)	Topic (focus of class)	Reading Assignments
<p>Week Ten (3/16 - 3/20)</p>	<p>Some Meanings</p>	<p>“Two Surprising Claims about Death: Dying Alone” (Kagan, <i>Death</i>, pp. 196-204)</p> <p>Augustine (All)</p> <p>Mengzi (All) Xunzi (All)</p>
<p>Reading Response #5 is due in Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Friday, March 20th.</p>		
<p>Spring Break (March 23rd - 27th)</p>		
<p>Week Eleven (3/30 - 4/3)</p>	<p>More Meanings</p>	<p>Confucius (All) Aristotle (Selections 1, 2, 9, 10, and 11)</p> <p>Hobbes (Chapter XIII)</p> <p><u>“Finite Responsibility and Infinite Hope”</u> (LINK to Podcast)</p>
<p>Week Twelve (4/6 - 4/10)</p>	<p>Inner Blocks</p>	<p><u>“On the Happy Life”</u> (LINK)</p> <p><u>“The Philosophy of Mexicanness”</u> (LINK)</p>
<p>Reading Response #6 is due in Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Friday, April 10th.</p>		

Dates (day of class)	Topic (focus of class)	Reading Assignments
<p>Week Thirteen (4/13 - 4/17)</p>	<p>Outer Blocks</p>	<p>Marx (Alienated Labor) “Hannah Arendt’s Political Thought” (LINK) “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (LINK)</p>
<p>Week Fourteen (4/20 - 4/24)</p>	<p>The Absurd</p>	<p>Sartre (Being-in-Itself) Kierkegaard (C - Despair is “The Sickness Unto Death”) “The Id and the Eco” (LINK) “This is Water” (LINK)</p>
<p>Reading Response #7 is due in Blackboard by 11:59 pm on Friday, April 24th.</p>		
<p>Week Fifteen (4/27 - 4/30)</p>	<p>On Monday, April 27th, we <i>will</i> have class; the day will be devoted to open review for Exam Two.</p> <p>Exam Two will be on Wednesday, April 29th. Please bring one Blue Book.</p>	
<p>Finals Week</p>	<p>We will not have a cumulative Final Exam in person, but your Term Paper must be submitted to Blackboard by 10:00 am on Wednesday, May 6th (the end of our Final Exam time).</p>	

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