

HON 201H (A): PERENNIAL QUESTIONS

THE PURSUIT OF THE ‘GOOD LIFE’

T/Th 3:30-4:45 p.m.
LAU 113 & The Honors Commons
SPRING 2013

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Course description

In this course we will examine a “timeless” concern of our species: What is the good life? What is the difference, if any, between a “happy life” and a “good life?” More specifically, we will examine some of the “goods” life offers that are clearly both a means to the good life and ends or goods in themselves. Obviously the “good life” is a combination of many smaller “goods.” In order to provide impetus for thought and class discussion, we will read various authors who, directly or indirectly, present ideas that attempt to define what is “good” in life or ideas that attempt to decline “truths” about life from which values and behavior may be derived that, in turn, may lead one to pursue elements of the “good and/or happy life.”



Some areas we will focus on are:

- How and what kind of education contributes to the “good life?”
- How and what kind of “character” or self-knowledge will best support the pursuit of the “good life?”
- What are some of the “images/concepts” of the “good life” proffered to us by our own culture?
- What types of responsibility does an individual have to create a good life for one’s self, for others?
- What does a “good” life mean in terms of our environment?
- How does a person plan a good life, or purposefully pursue one?

Course goals

Conscious and close analytical reading of assigned texts is central to whatever learning takes place in this course. Our effort will be to learn how to read more effectively so that as much as possible of the original author’s ideas become available to enrich our own thinking, and, perhaps, behavior.

A closely related goal is the development of critical and analytical thinking skills. In discussion, students will need to summarize, refer to, evaluate and integrate ideas encountered in the readings and in class discussion. In turn, the response of the instructor and other students will stimulate and demand collegial but also critical responses to ideas as they are presented.

More generally, our goal will be to begin a focused and sustained analysis of a basic question our species must have begun to ask whenever self-reflexive consciousness

became a part of our being: what makes life “good”? We do not need to set as our goals the discovery of final answers; rather, our goal is to discover some of the “better” paths one might follow as we pursue answers to the question of, “What is the good life?”

Course requirements

- Response papers (roughly 2 pages each)
- Final, comprehensive paper (roughly 10 pages)
- Leadership of discussion (frequency dependent on enrollment)
- Participation in discussion (each and every class)
- Professionalism, leadership, civility and citizenship
- A presentation of your final project, a life plan

How you will be graded

Response papers	40%
Final paper	20%
Discussion participation, including blog posts	15%
Discussion leadership	10%
Professionalism	10%
Presentation	5%
TOTAL	100%

A theory about human nature and grading: Most human beings turn out average work most of the time. Many can do superior work. Of that many, most could do excellent work. The factors involved are obvious: native intellect, gifts from the gods, interest, desire to succeed, desire to learn, discipline, and sheer hard work. The first two are beyond our control. The others are within our control.

To compute your final grade, add up your point totals, apply the appropriate percentages, then refer to the grading system summarized here:

A = 93-100	A-= 90-92	B+=88-89	B=83-87
B- = 80-82	C+= 78-79	C=73-77	C-=70-72
D+= 68-69	D=60-67	F=59 and below	

Definitions of the grades can be found in the Berry College Catalog. “A” students will demonstrate an outstanding mastery of course material and will perform **far above** that required for credit in the course and **far above** that usually seen in the course. The “A” grade should be awarded sparingly and should identify student performance that is relatively unusual in the course.

Attendance/class participation

You are required to be in class. Recognizing that illness or personal problems may, rarely, cause one not to be able to come to class, two absences and/or latenesses are allowed before your course grade is affected. Unless credible, extreme circumstances

arise that cause more than two absences, any absence beyond the two will deduct a point from the professionalism/participation portion of the course grade.

You are required to bring relevant readings, journal entries, and other materials to class as outlined elsewhere on daily syllabus. Failure to have copies of assigned reading materials could also result in professionalism/participation deductions.

Decorum

Distractions: I am easily distracted, and so are you. Therefore, no digital device use is allowed during class (mobile phones, iPads, etc.). No texting and no laptops. You don't need them. Be professional and civil, pay attention and participate fully in discussion. If you are unsure about what "civil" means, we can (and should) talk.

Preparation: Complete the assignments and be ready to tackle the activities of the day. Be ready to discuss and debate ideas, approaches and opinions. Do all of the required reading BEFORE class.

Academic integrity: Because academic integrity is the foundation of college life at Berry, academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure on the assignment in question. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, fabrication, submitting the same work in multiple courses, and aiding and abetting. For definitions of these terms, please consult the instructor. Students who are sanctioned for violating the academic integrity policy forfeit the right to withdraw from the class with a grade of "W."

What you will need

Electronic copies of course readings, which will be provided by the professor

Some key URLs:

Class blog: <http://wanderingrocks.wordpress.com>

Mitchell readings: <http://www.sourcetext.com/grammarians>

Stuff you need to know

Instructor: Dr. Brian Carroll, Laughlin 100

Office phone: 706.368.6944 (direct)

E-mail: bc@berry.edu | bc@unc.edu

Home page: <http://www.cubanxgiants.com>

Blog: <http://wanderingrocks.wordpress.com>

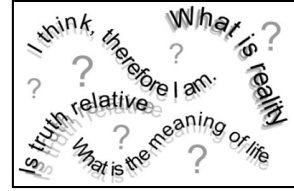
Office hours: MWF 2-5, TUE 1-3 | by appointment | walk-ins welcome

Course website and online syllabus: <http://www.cubanxgiants.com/berry/goodlife>

Writing requirements

You will be writing throughout the semester, realizing that writing IS thinking. It's difficult to write every day; it's difficult to write poorly every day. As your writing

improves, so will your thinking, which will produce yet better writing. A virtuous cycle. The course asks you to write in three basic forms or formats: two-page response papers, a deep analysis of roughly 10 pages, and short comments to the class blog, <http://wanderingrocks.wordpress.com>.



These various writing assignments will invite you to engage in the pursuit of course goals as outlined above. The response papers should not be considered an informal diary of cryptic, vague thoughts, randomly recalled as they are inspired by a muse. Rather, they should be a deliberate and systematic analysis of ideas written in complete sentences and well-developed paragraphs.

To give you a sense of the kinds of writing you will be doing, below are a few possibilities for writing emphases in your response papers. The list is not comprehensive, but should help you begin thinking about what to write (and how to write):

1. Consider significant arguments that cause you to think, to recognize a new perspective on or a new analysis of some idea/issue. In this type of response, you would define what the key idea is and then explain or analyze how and why that idea is significant to other parts of the article or to larger issues under discussion in the class. In this type of paper, you will not re-tell, re-phrase or merely summarize what you have read. Instead, you will explain and analyze what ideas in the passages are provocative, new, troubling, brilliant and/or insightful. Identify and react to these “must be grasped” ideas, concepts and perspectives to retrieve from the article its essential ideas. Include **why** they are significant.
2. Think about and comment on some of the **implications** of one or more specific ideas in the article: implications for other articles we have read and their key ideas; for your own understanding of the idea discussed in the article or for related ideas you have previously held; for values and beliefs related to our culture; for your own understanding, values, beliefs, and behaviors as any one or more of those relate to some as part of “happiness” or a good life.
3. Once we’ve read a few articles, I will ask you to write about how you see how two or more of the articles’ ideas interact. What is it you have noticed? Why is it intellectually engaging? What are some questions and issues that have arisen directly from readings or class discussion that you want to pursue further?
4. Look at your own life; the life you observe among your friends and peers; the life you see in our culture. What elements of the “good life” do you NOW see as potential parts of the good life **because** of readings and class discussion?
5. Given our readings and class discussion, what old ideas about a “good” in life appear somehow less good (or more good) than before? Explain. What NEW ideas are germinating, creating new perspectives on possible “goods” in life or new ways of looking at “old” goods? Give examples, and analyze why these new ideas seem like possible goods worth pursuing.

For all of the ideas and themes above, **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE NIGHT BEFORE TO WRITE YOUR PAPERS.** As Ernest Hemingway put it: “All first drafts are sh--.” And remember rule one of and for writing: “Sit your butt in the chair.”

Revisions of earlier ideas/analyses will also be required. You will get fair warning on when these will be due, and which papers you are to revise. These revisions (think ‘re-VISIONing,’ seeing anew) are critical, both for discussion and for your own journey.

You will get much more help with the writing projects as the semester unfolds.

Calendar of class sessions

The calendar is an educated guess outlining the various activities we will undertake. Small or significant changes will be announced in class so that you can alter our tentative class plan as needed. If you are absent and if changes are made, you are still responsible for those changes.

Print and bring all articles to class on day(s) they are to be discussed, and of course you should have read them prior to our discussion of them.

Week 1: Jan. 15, 17 Introductions

Introductions, class policies, roadmap of where we’re going. Discussion of learning and thinking—critical and analytical. Discussion of why learning (and un-learning) is often difficult. Stipulation of terms, such as ‘happiness’, ‘ethics’, ‘morality’, ‘good.’

1. Syllabus, in its entirety (quiz possible)
2. Darrin M. McMahon’s “History of Happiness” pp. 1-15; 8-15, 26-32

Week 2: Jan. 22, 24 What is happiness?

The role of ethics, community. The notion of ‘flourishing.’ ‘Doing’ happiness.

1. Darrin M. McMahon’s “History of Happiness” pp. 26-32
2. J. O’Toole’s “Creating a Good Life”
3. Pedro Tabensky’s “Flourishing”, pp. 12-13
4. Alan Lightman’s “A Brief Version of Time” (hyperlink, *The New York Times*)

Week 3: Jan. 29, 31 Education and the Good Life

With the readings that follow, we begin a sub-section on “Education and the Good Life.” You are now beginning your intellectual adventures in “higher education, so it is a good time to reflect on what “education” is and how it might influence one’s happiness or “good life” or some part of a “good life.” If nothing else, one can hope to grasp the “goods” of education.

1. Aristotle’s “Happiness”
2. Review (or re-read) O’Toole’s “What is Happiness”

3. Mitchell's Chapter 12 (How to Live) from *The Gift of Fire*. Note: Our first chapter from Mitchell is the last chapter in his book. Don't worry; I know what I'm doing. Mitchell refers to Petronella—a story he presents earlier in the book; I'll explain.
4. Raymond Tallis's "Rethinking Thinking" (hyperlink, *Wall Street Journal*)

NOTE: All readings from Mitchell should be found at <http://www.sourcetext.com/grammarians/>. All readings from Mitchell are for entire chapters. You should print the assigned chapters and bring them to class.

Week 4, Feb. 5, 7 Education and the Good Life, continued

1. Wayne C. Booth's "What is Supposed to be Going on Here?"
2. Plato's "Living in a Cave"

Week 5, Feb. 12, 14 What is education?

1. Mitchell's Chapter I, "Who is Socrates..."
2. Edmundson's "On the Uses of a Liberal Education as Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students"
3. Life plan instructions (linked .pdf download)

Week 6, Feb. 19, 21 Governing ourselves

1. Mitchell's Chapter 9, "Home Rule" and Chapter 10 "Colonialism"
2. Nannerl O. Keohane's "The Liberal Arts as Guideposts in the 21st Century" (hyperlink, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*)
3. Film: *Educating Rita*

Week 7, Feb. 26, 28 Time, memory and living backwards

1. Ludwig's "Living Backwards"
2. Film: *La Jetée*

SPRING BREAK: March 4-8 - woohoo!!

Week 8, March 12, 14 The Man (or Woman) in the Mirror

1. Haidt's "The Divided Self"
2. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's "Materialism and the Evolution of Consciousness"
3. Rosenberg's "Mindfulness and Consumerism"

Week 9, March 19, 21 The Little Things and the Animal Kingdom

>>BC POSSIBLY IN EUROPE

1. Mitchell's Chapter 4, "The Right Little Thing"
2. Frans de Waal's "Kindness"

Week 10: March 26, 28 Consumerism and religion

1. Twitchell's "Attention K-Mart Shoppers," pp. 23-32 and pp. 56-61
2. Film: *Ma Vie en Rose*

Week 11: April 2, 4 Individual responsibility

The last sub-section of our course will focus on what role, and how much, individual responsibility should play in one's pursuit of happiness and a good life. We will focus on recent and growing awareness of how, as individuals pursue "a good life," their behavior and its implicit value assumptions can often have a negative effect upon the environment. To a lesser extent, we will carry over our discussions of how the way one defines and shapes a "self" influences one's sense of responsibility and may affect how one pursues environmental responsibility.

1. Williams's "Save the Whales, Screw the Shrimp"
2. Wilson's "In Search of Nature"

Week 12: April 9 Free will v. determinism

>>No class Thursday, BC at Elon University

1. Leopold's "The Land Ethic"

Week 13: April 18 Free will v. determinism

>>No class Tuesday, Symposium on Student Scholarship

1. Mark Smith's "Obligations to Future Generations"
2. Van Werven's "Something Old, Something New"
3. "Is Free Will an Illusion" package of stories (hyperlink, *The Chronicle*)

Week 14: April 23, 25 Blinded by science

1. "The Physical Science behind Climate Change," *Scientific American*
2. Diamond's "The Third Chimpanzee"
3. View video from *Collapse* by Jared Diamond (in class)

Week 15: April 30

Life plan presentations.