Philosophy 195: Philosophical Explorations in Happiness
Kalamazoo College
Fall 2014

Instructor: Patrick Ahern    E-Mail: patrick.ahern@kzoo.edu
Meeting Location: Upjohn Library, Room 308
Meeting Times: Monday, Wednesday 10:00am-11:35am, Friday 10:00am-10:40am
Office Location: Humphrey 202
Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday 11:45am-12:45am

Course Description:

What is happiness? What would it mean to live happily? Are there some conditions in which happiness can be realized and others in which it would be restricted? The question of what happiness entails, and what are the ways and conditions in which human beings can experience happiness has been a persistent concern of philosophers since antiquity to the present day. In this class, we will look to a variety of ways that Western thinkers have responded to both the question of what happiness is and what it would mean to live happily. We will also examine the way in which our happiness could be tied to both the nature of our desires and the freedom that we may have to realize happiness. This will include looking at the perspective of some of the ancients (Aristotle, Stoics, Epicureans), the modern thinkers that have crafted the understanding of our right to the "pursuit of happiness," as well as more recent theorist who have confronted the issue of happiness in society. Such an examination will help to clarify the importance of our conceptions of happiness as well as the conditions that allow us to realize happiness.

Texts:

* Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Shocken)

Course Requirements and Grading:

*Reading and Short Writing Assignments*: It is crucial that you complete the readings on the assigned day and that you have given the text careful consideration before coming to class. Since it will take more than one reading of the texts to familiarize yourself with the ideas presented, you should have the initial reading of the material for the following week done by Monday of the assigned week. The reading schedule will serve as a guide. However, we may adjust the pace of the assignments to provide for more in-depth analysis and in the interest of opportunities for learning.
You will have three short writing assignments (at least two pages, double-spaced) covering the material to be covered in class. The specific task for each writing assignment will be given the class prior to its due date. For each of the readings, you will be expected to find three questions or points of interest from the text that may be addressed in class discussion. Short writing assignments will not be accepted late.

**Essays:** You will be required to write two papers of at least five pages each. The topics will be distributed in class. I will be available to meet with anyone who seeks individual assistance with your paper, and I *strongly* encourage you to take advantage of this extra assistance in writing your papers. Essays that are late (i.e. not handed in at the time that they are due in class) are subject to a full grade reduction for each day that the essay is late. Exceptions will be made only for extreme circumstances (death, serious illness, etc.) and must be granted in advance.

**Class Discussion Leading:** You will be expected to lead class discussion on at least one occasion. You will be expected to briefly evaluate what issues or problems compelled the writer to write the reading(s) we are covering in class that day, and present an account of how they responded to that problem. You will offer an evaluation of the claims, arguments, etc. made in the day’s reading. Also, you will come to class with several questions inspired by the readings for class discussion. To be clear, you are not expected to have a definitive reading or expertise to lead the class discussion. You will simply be expected to help draw the class into the questions that compel a writer and a preliminary sketch of the manner in which they ask or address those questions. In some cases, it can even be more valuable to point out the specific moments in a text that you found particularly puzzling or challenging for the class to tackle as a group. Along with leading the discussion, you will provide each student in the class a two-page typed guide that will assist in your presentation of the material. On days that there may be more than one presenter, each presenter is expected to write the two-page write-up to compliment your respective presentation of the material.

**Attendance and Participation:** Active participation in class discussion is key to drawing as much as possible from the readings and the course in general. The class will involve a mixture of lecture and discussion, and you are expected to come to class with questions and comments about the reading. You are entitled to two unexcused absences before your grade is reduced by one step (A to A-, B+ to B, etc.).

**Grade Breakdown:**
- Two Essays: 65% (30% and 35%)
- Short Reflections: 5%
- Discussion Leading: 20%
- Participation: 10%
Disabilities:

If you have a disability requiring special accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible so that the necessary arrangements can be made.

Final Note:

I view this class as a collaborative effort where as a group we will be engaging with these thinkers and texts. To that end, I encourage feedback from you regarding anything in the class that you find most or least helpful to your understanding or interest in the material. While I am aware that many of the ideas in the class will be challenging, it is my hope that the classroom atmosphere will be conducive to lively discussion and encourage you to take risks in your own thinking. You may even surprise yourself!

Tentative Reading Schedule:

**Week One** (September 15/17/19): Introduction; Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* (*Happiness*, pp. 19-34)

**Week Two** (September 22/24/26): Epicurus (pp. 34-40); Seneca (pp. 41-51)

**Week Three** (Sept. 29; Oct. 1/3): Augustine and Thomas Aquinas (pp. 51-67)

**Week Four** (October 6/8/10): Thomas Hobbes (pp. 68-77); Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface


**Week Six** (October 20/22): Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

**Week Seven** (October 27/29/31): Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Chapters 1-5)

**Week Eight** (November 3/5/7): *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Chapters 6-8); Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty” and “Unpacking My Library”

**Week Nine** (November 10/12/14): Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller” and “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

**Week Ten** (November 17/19/21): Simone DeBeauvoir, Introduction to *The Second Sex*; TBD