

## PHIL 190: "Flourishing or "the good life"

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Office Hours: W 3-5

### Course Overview & Objectives

Our task is to explore what human flourishing entails and to consider what enables and frustrates its emergence. The question is at once academic and personal, and we will operate in both registers, particularly across the assignments, which will involve various kinds of writing and expression.

To further our reflections, we will read a range of texts. But we also will engage students in other first-year seminars also exploring flourishing, and so our course will border on and benefit from working with others.

### Common Themes

Each course in the cluster of seminars exploring flourishing from diverse perspectives touches upon three themes: connection, transformation, and expression.

- Connection: Humans are relational, dependent beings. Their well-being is dependent on those relations, and those relations impact the more than human world. What relations allows us to thrive and feel at home or to have a sense of belonging? What relations lead to experiences of alienation and dislocation? In its own way, each course will look at how "connections" are integral to the human and more than human world. In this course, we will explore this theme in terms of socio-cultural (Aristotle and Du Bois), economic (Thoreau), ecological (Leopold and Naess), and interpersonal relations (Aristotle and Friedman).
- Transformation: Humans are creatures of action. They monitor their worlds and their welfare within it. They also adjust themselves and try to modify their worlds in an effort to find lives worth living. In its own way, each course will look at agency and how it navigates a world of connection, including situations that undermine the agency of people, whether through accidentally adverse conditions or socio-political histories of oppression. In this course, we will explore this theme in terms of how habit, perception, and judgment as well as choice and commitment figure into an effort to live in a flourishing manner. Every text addresses these issues in one way or another.
- Expression: In multiple, diverse ways, humans give voice to their condition and their experience of it. They ask and reply to questions such as: who am I? What is happening to me? Who do I want to become? What do I want to see realized in my world? What would I remove? In its own way, each course will ask students to

give expression to questions like these, and to reply from their own, developing point of view. In this course, you will pursue this task in terms of weekly reflection papers and in the form of a letter to your future self.

### **Course Format**

A text will be assigned for every class. Our task is to locate and engage the thought of that day's reading. Typical questions will include: What is the author saying? What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the positions presented? Our goal is to think with these texts not just about them.

Initially, I will take the lead in organizing our discussions. But over time we should move into a full seminar format, meaning, you should arrive prepared to draw your peers' attention to particular passages and links among passages, and to work through them.

### **Course Materials**

We are reading a handful of books or rather portions of books. They are available at the Emory bookstore. You must use the edition assigned. Also, please bring a copy of the day's text to class. Readings followed by PDF will be distributed through Canvas.

### **Reading Schedule**

8/24 W: Opening Day

8/29 M: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I [Group A]

8/31: W: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I [Group B]

9/5: M: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II [Group A]

9/7: W Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books III & IV [Group B]

9/12 M: Thoreau, *Walden*, "Economy" [Group A]

9/14 W Thoreau, *Walden*, "Economy" [Group B]

9/19 M: Thoreau, *Walden*, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" [Group A]

9/21W: Thoreau, *Walden*, "Higher Laws" [Group B]

9/26 M: Leopold, "The Land Ethic" [Group A] PDF

9/28 W: Naess, "The Deep Ecology Movement" [Group B] PDF

10/3 M: Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 1-3 [Group A]

10/5 W: Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 1-3 [Group B]

10/10 M: Fall Break  
10/12 W: Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 4-6  
10/17: M: Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 4-6 [Group A]  
10/19: W: Discussion  
10/24 M: Segall, *Buddhism and Human Flourishing*, 1-2 [Group B]  
10/26 W: Segall, *Buddhism and Human Flourishing*, 3-4  
10/31 M: Segall, *Buddhism and Human Flourishing*, 5-6 [Group A]  
11/2 W: Segall, *Buddhism and Human Flourishing*, 7 [Group B]  
11/7 M: de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Chapter 1 [Group A]  
11/9 W: de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Chapter 1 [Group B]  
11/14 M: de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Chapter 2 [Group A]  
11/16 W: de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Chapter 2 [Group B]  
11/21 M: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 8 & 9  
11/23 W: Thanksgiving Break  
11/28 M: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 8 & 9  
11/30 W: Friedman, "Friendship & Moral Growth" & "Friendship, Choice, & Change"  
PDF  
12/5 M: Closing Day

### **Joint Sessions**

This course involves joint sessions with other courses participating in the First Year Seminar Flourishing initiative. We will be meeting on 9/28 with COMP LIT 190 to jointly discuss Leopold's "Land Ethic." The location is TBA. Later, we will meet with REL 190, "Religion and Human Flourishing" on Wednesday evening, 11/2, at 7 PM. Location is also TBD. We will discuss a text common to both classes, *Buddhism and Human Flourishing*.

### **Assignments**

Six kinds of assignments constitute your work for this class.

[1] *Weekly reading and course discussion.* Attendance is required. With the exception of prolonged illnesses or emergencies, any absence beyond the third will lower your final grade by 1/3, meaning, a B+ in the course will become a B.

[2] *Weekly writing.* Once per week, excepting specified classes, you must write a 1-page, single-spaced response to that day's reading. First, summarize a central point from the reading, citing a relevant passage from the text. Then apply that point to some facet of your own life, beliefs, and/or commitments. Does the author's point illuminate that facet of your life? If so, how? If not, why not? And if not, is this because the author's point is false or limited in its application? These papers will be graded on a S/U basis. Students must rewrite papers that receive a "U." The class has been divided into two groups, A and B. Successful completion of all the short papers is worth 25% of your final grade.

[3] *Short, expository essay.* 4-5 double spaced pages, 12-point font, standard margins. Due 9/23 by 5 pm. In a short essay, articulate what Thoreau is trying to accomplish in the chapter entitled "Where I Lived and What I Lived for." Also, explain how the project outlined in the chapter relates to efforts detailed in the previous chapter, "Economy." Finally, what do you consider the most thought-provoking dimension of "Where I Lived and What I Lived for"? In answering, develop, with an example of your own making, the thought provoked by Thoreau's text. This paper will receive a letter grade and is worth 20% of your final grade.

[4] *Letter to your future self:* Please write a letter to yourself to be read during your junior year. (The letter should be no less than 500 words.) Working with materials encountered in this class, offer your future self some advice on how to flourish. What activities and connections should be sought? What situations should be avoided or transformed? The letter is due on 12/2 and is worth 10% of your final grade. Also, we would like to collect all of the letters from all the courses in this initiative and create a digital archive. After Thanksgiving, you will be asked whether you are willing or unwilling to include your letter in that archive. That decision will have no bearing on your grade.

[5] After each joint session, you must write a 1-page, single-spaced reflection on how the two disciplines represented address the subject matter discussed. What similarities did you notice? Any differences? These will be graded P/NP and account for 5% of your grade.

[6] Your final assignment is due in stages. The first stage, due on 10/21, identifies and briefly describes three principles that you believe are integral to human flourishing. The second stage, due 11/4, is an annotated bibliography of 6 sources (2 per principle) that you will use to discuss those principles. The third stage, due 11/18, is a complete draft (6-8 pages) of your paper. Your paper must {i} identify each principle in a distinct manner and explain how it contributes to flourishing, {ii} provide an example of what each principle looks like when enacted, {iii} engage the texts that address your principles, {iv} consider social conditions that might compromise and/or enable one's ability to enact those principles, {v} consider what could be done to confront those obstacles or secure those conditions. The first two stages will be graded on an S/U basis. Students receiving

a “U” must revise their work. The third stage will receive a letter grade that will account for 20% of your final grade. The fourth stage will involve a revision of your draft, following the revision model distributed in class. Your revised draft is due on 12/12 at 5 pm. The revision is worth 15% of your final grade.

When revising, follow this model, submitting each completed task (\*) with your final paper.

1. Reread your draft, considering my comments.
2. Offer a 1 sentence summary of the main point in each paragraph.\*
3. Reread your draft a second time and evaluate how well each paragraph {a} conveys that main point, and {b} supports that point. Award a full point if you are completely satisfied with {a} and another full point if you are completely satisfied with {b}. Reduce the score of each paragraph incrementally to reflect any dissatisfactions. Each paragraph should thus receive a score between zero and two. Record this score alongside your 1 sentence summary of the paragraph.\*
4. Revise your paper in response to my comments and your own self-evaluation.\* This may require you to rework an interpretation, engage other passages, move paragraphs, add new paragraphs, or just add a sentence or two. The revision will be evaluated in part for how significantly you rethink your analysis and argument.

[7] I also will provide you with an opportunity to accrue extra credit. You may pursue one of four options or propose one of your own. [A] Read a scholarly essay on one of the texts covered in class and write a three-page discussion of its central argument. [B] Read an essay on friendship not assigned write a three-page discussion that compares it to Aristotle’s discussion. [C] Read an unassigned chapter of *Souls* and write a three-page paper explicating it and relating it to the chapters that have been assigned. [D] Write a four-page dialogue that includes two of the authors we’ve read and yourself or some other third party.

## Rubrics

What kind of paper deserves an “A,” “B,” etc.?

**A** = excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.

**B** = good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.

**C** = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.

**D** = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.

**F** = failing. Numerous errors and no real grasp of the material.

With regard to graded papers, I will use a 12-point scale, with 12 = A, F = 1. (A “C” paper is thus a 6.)

Points will be assigned in four categories: accuracy of exposition, organization of sentences, paragraphs, and the paper as a whole; depth of engagement; and the quality of your argumentation. On rare occasions, an extra point may be awarded for particularly imaginative work. On even rarer occasions, I have awarded an A+.

The extra-credit assignment is worth between one and three points toward one of the following: the short expository paper, the staged assignment draft, and the final version of your staged assignment.

Your final grade will reflect the follow distribution:

- Short, expository paper: 15%
- Staged Assignment summary: 5%
- Staged assignment annotated bibliography: 5%
- Staged Assignment Draft: 20%
- Staged Assignment Revision: 15%
- Letter to future self: 10%
- Joint session papers: 5%
- Weekly papers: 25%

If you believe that your paper has been graded unfairly, schedule an appointment to make your case. In making your case, you must employ the above criteria and address the comments made on your paper.

### **Academic Honesty**

Please consult the following web page for details concerning the honor code governing your work in this class:

[http://www.college.emory.edu/current/standards/honor\\_code.html](http://www.college.emory.edu/current/standards/honor_code.html)Links to an external site.  
Links to an external site.

### **Late Papers**

Late papers will receive a zero (or NP) for the assignment. A paper will be defined as “late” if you hand it in after class concludes (or after 5 pm in the vase of papers due outside of class) and you have not secured an extension. Extensions are usually given for reasons of illness or academic conflict such as having three papers due on a given day. That said, it never hurts to ask.

### **Communicating with the Instructor**

Questions about course mechanics and deadlines, including requests for extensions, should be sent via e-mail. During the week, students can expect a reply within 24 hours, most likely between 10 am and 5 pm. The instructor does not consult e-mail after 5 pm or before 10 am. Philosophical issues should be handled in office hours. Simply request a meeting over e-mail and one will be arranged within a week. For emergencies, text the instructor at 404.520.8912

## **Technology in the Classroom**

Students are not allowed to use any electronic instrument during class unless to accommodate a certified disability. Phones and laptops must be shut off and put away. Students who use their phones or laptops during class will be marked absent for the day.

## **Students with Disabilities**

Emory University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and offers accommodations to students with disabilities. If you need an accommodation, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. All information will be held in the strictest confidence.

## **Discursive Norms**

The Philosophy Department is committed to rich and inclusive courses. It expects participants to engage the material and one another in thoughtful, respectful, and generous ways. Participants should share their thoughts and leave room for, as well as respond to, others. This holds for face-to-face discussions as well as synchronous Zoom sessions.

Participants bring distinct dispositions, interests, and background knowledges to class, and speak from positions of diverse social standing. A strong course not only tolerates but also embraces such differences and the insights and issues they generate, which can include disagreement. When disagreements arise, participants should be respectful and thoughtful regardless of whether one receives or delivers an objection.