Course Description. Two of the most fundamental questions that are addressed, more or less explicitly, in many of the arts, the humanities, and the sciences are the questions of what it means to be human, and of how to live a good human life. Indeed, these questions arise naturally for every one of us who approaches life in a reflective way and thinks about how to make the best of it. These two questions will also function as the main guiding questions for this course. We will be reading and discussing important works of literature and philosophy from the ancient world up to the present that speak to these questions in some way or another. In some of these works, our questions are tackled in a fairly straightforward manner; in others, they are addressed more indirectly, through the presentation of a particular way of life or individual lived experiences. We will be examining these writings with the goal of broadening and deepening our understanding of possible answers to our questions in the hope that this will bring us closer to answering them for ourselves.


Aims for the course. This course has four main aims. The first of them is to deepen your love and appreciation for reading and thinking about important works of literature and philosophy. Many of these works are challenging but the hope is that you will come to agree that the considerable rewards of seriously engaging with them more than make up for the effort. The second aim is to improve your skills at critical reading, disciplined oral argumentation, and clear and well-organized writing. The third aim is to convince you of the value of an “examined life,” i.e., a life in which you question the status quo, and do not tire of thinking about what you ought to do and how to be the best version of yourself that you could possibly be. Finally, like all Texts and Ideas courses, this course aims to foster your recognition of the value and importance of humanistic learning, which lies at the very foundation of a liberal arts education. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, it is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, and to help prepare you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society.

Requirements and grading. There will be four papers (about 5 pages, 12.5% each), a midterm exam (17.5%), and a final exam (17.5%). Your participation in the recitations will also be taken into account in determining your grade (15%), and you can earn an additional “grade boost” by participating in the lectures. You must complete all of the required assignments with passing-grade quality in order to pass the course. Frequent unexcused absences may lead to failing the course.

Preparation. Our discussion in class will be based on the assigned readings for the particular day. Accordingly, it is essential for you to do the readings beforehand.
**Special Accommodations.** If you are a student who requires accommodation for a disability please get in touch with me, and consult with the Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (https://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/students-with-disabilities).

**Schedule**

1/24 ~ Introduction, Logistics.
1/26 ~ Plato, *The Apology*.

1/31 ~ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections from books I, II, and X; digital copy available on Brightspace).
2/2 ~ Plato, *Symposium*, 172a–198a (to the end of Agathon’s speech).

2/7 ~ *Symposium*, 198a–end.
2/9 ~ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Cantos 1–4 (digital copy available on Brightspace); the topic for the first paper will be posted on Brightspace by 5 p.m.

2/21 ~ President’s Day; NYU closed.
2/23 ~ Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, “That to study philosophy is to learn to die” (digital copy available on Brightspace); first paper due by 5 p.m., to be submitted through Brightspace.

2/28 ~ Berthold Brecht, *The Life of Galileo*. (If you are pressed for time and need to split up your reading of Brecht, read scenes 1–12 for 2/28 and the remaining ones for 3/2.)
3/2 ~ Brecht continued.

3/7 ~ Immanuel Kant, “An answer to the question: what is enlightenment” (digital copy available on Brightspace).
3/9 ~ Midterm Exam; the topic for the second paper will be posted on Brightspace by 5 p.m.

3/14&16 ~ Spring Break

3/23 ~ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, chapters 1–10; second paper due by 5 p.m., to be submitted through Brightspace.

3/28 ~ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, chapter 11 & Appendix.
3/30 ~ Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilytch*;

4/6 ~ *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, chapters 12–20; the topic for the third paper will be posted on Brightspace by 5 p.m.

4/11 ~ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*. (If you are pressed for time and need to split up your reading of Woolf, read chapters 1–4 for 4/11 and the remaining ones for 4/13.)
4/13 ~ Woolf continued; third paper due by 5 p.m., to be submitted through Brightspace.
4/20 ~ *Survival in Auschwitz*, chapters 10–16.

4/25 ~ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*. (If you are pressed for time and need to split up your reading of Morrison, read chapters 1–7 for 4/25, and the remaining ones for 4/27.)
4/27 ~ Morrison continued; the topic for the fourth paper will be posted on Brightspace by 5 p.m.

5/2 ~ Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat’s Cradle*, chapters 1–76
5/4 ~ *Cat’s Cradle*, chapters 77–127; fourth paper due by 5 p.m., to be submitted through Brightspace.


TBA ~ Final Exam.