

CORE-UA 9400 SH11, Texts and Ideas: What is a Good Human Life?

Note: Subject to Change

The syllabus and course schedule may be subject to change. Changes will be communicated via email and in NYU LMS (Brightspace). It is your responsibility to check email messages and course announcements to stay current in the online phase of the course.

Instructor Information

- Instructor: Dr. Zee R Perry, Visiting Assistant Professor of Practice in Philosophy, NYU Shanghai
- Email Address: zee.perry@nyu.edu
- Work Phone Number: +86 16621668372
- Office Location: 1555 Century Avenue, Office 1256 (12th floor)
- Office Hours: [TBA]

Course Information

- **Course Number:** CORE-UA 9400 SH11
- **Course Description:**

What does it mean to be a human being? And how does one live a good human life? These are questions that get at the core of the human condition, and have been addressed, more or less explicitly, in many of the arts, humanities, and even the sciences. This class will serve as a means for students to explore these questions and various attempts to answer them. 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. These will include philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Marx and Engels, Frederick Douglass, as well as works of literature by Sophocles, Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Kurt Vonnegut, Camus, Kafka, and more. 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.

Readings. Plato, *The Apology*, *Crito*, *The Symposium*; Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (selections); Ibn Sina, *The Book of Optics*; Michel de Montaigne, *Essays* (selections); William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*; Berthold Brecht, *The Life of Galileo*; Immanuel Kant, 'An answer to the question: what is enlightenment?'; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Douglass; Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*; Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*; Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*; Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*; Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*; Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*; John Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*.

- **Class Room:** 999 South Pudong Road, Rm 2503
- **Class Meeting Times:** M/W 9:45 – 11:00am
- **Recitation Meeting Times:** F 9:30-10:20am, F 10:45-11:35am, F 1:30-2:20pm, F 2:35-3:25pm
- **Recitation Room:** [[TBA]]
- **Recitation Instructors:** [[TBA]]

Course Overview and Learning Outcomes

The main aims of this course are as follows:

To arm the student with an appreciation of reading and thinking about some of the most influential works of literature and philosophy. The hope is that this class will deepen the student's love for humanistic inquiry, in particular philosophical inquiry and debate, as well as the benefits of putting in the effort to work through difficult, intellectually stimulating readings. To provide the student skills in critical reading and reflection, clear and careful debate and discussion, and concise, thoughtful writing.

To teach the students the value of living an examined life, and to encourage them to engage in serious self-examination and reflection, to be willing to challenge the status quo and your own preconceptions, and to never 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 Text and Ideas courses, this course also 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.

Instruction Mode

This course will be taught in-person.

Course 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%). One of the writing assignments will be about a movie; another one will require you to visit [[Art Museum in Shanghai, as dictated by current exhibitions and COVID-19

restrictions]]. Your participation in the recitations and the lectures will also be taken into account in determining your grade (15%). You must complete all of the required assignments in order to pass the course. Frequent unexcused absences may lead to failing the course.

Attendance and Participation Self-Reports

Attendance in this course as well as participation during discussions class and recitation meetings are required. However, I am aware that many students don't always feel comfortable speaking up in a group setting. As such, each week will have an Attendance, Reading, and Participation Self-Report, which will be due by the end of that weekend. In this assignment, you should submit a short description and discussion of your participation in the class during the previous week. This will include:

1. A report of whether or not you attended Monday and Wednesday's classes, and whether you attended your Friday recitation. If you were unable to attend one or another, explain (in a few words, and without violating your own privacy) what went wrong.
2. A report of what interested you most in the discussion that occurred. Don't just describe a general topic, but try to refer to specific points made or ideas discussed (make use of the notes you take during the class discussion). Do you have any questions, follow-ups, or responses about that point/topic? If you didn't or weren't able to participate, discuss why you think that happened, and feel free to offer suggestions to me for ways I can provide more opportunities for you to participate in the future (if that's something you think would help you).
3. A report of whether you were able to do the assigned readings before the associated class. Were you able to read them closely/multiple times? If so, were there parts of the reading that you found interesting? Were there parts you found confusing or philosophically objectionable? If you were unable to read the assigned readings until after the associated class, or if you still haven't read them, explain why, and describe what steps you'll try to take to better keep up with the material next week.

This self-report is required, but it will not be graded for content (so you don't have to worry about polishing your discussions of the material, or about massaging the truth to make it sound like you did the reading). Rather, it will be graded for honesty and completion. The purpose of this assignment is to make sure that your approach to your attendance, readings, and participation is thoughtful, deliberate, and intentional.

Observance of Religious Holidays: You may miss class for the observance of religious holidays. If you anticipate being absent because of religious observance, notify me in advance so we can create a plan for making up missed work. For more on this policy:

<https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html>

Competitions, Conferences, Presentations: You are permitted to be absent from classes to participate in competitions, conferences, and presentations, either at home or out of town, as approved by the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs. Review the Undergraduate Bulletin for the conditions you must meet to obtain approval for this kind of absence.

Extended Illness: If you are ill and need to miss more than one week of classes, you must speak to the Health & Wellness Office. Once Health and Wellness verifies the reasons for your extended absence, I will consult with Academic Affairs and recommend the best course of action. I will not look at doctors' notes, both for your health privacy reasons and because I cannot verify the authenticity or content of the notes.

Four Short Papers

There will be four short (≤ 5 page) papers due over the course of the semester, based on prompts distributed when these papers are assigned. Some of them will have prompts that relate directly to topics covered in current or recent readings, others will not. One of the writing assignments will be about a movie; another one will require you to visit [[Art Museum in Shanghai, as dictated by current exhibitions and COVID-19 restrictions]]. In all cases, you will be asked to do more than simply respond, react, or summarize. The prompt will ask specific interpretive questions, and your paper will be expected to be pointed, focused, and consist of clear critique and cogent argumentation. More detailed grading standards will be distributed with the first paper prompt.

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will include cover all of the material up to that point, and will focus on general questions about the previous readings. The exam will also contain more open-ended questions about the themes shared between different readings, as well as the over-arching questions of the course.

Final Exam

The final exam will be cumulative, with a slight focus on more recent material. It will focus on general questions about the previous readings, the themes shared between different readings, and the over-arching questions of the course. In addition, the exam will invite further reflection on the topics covered in the four papers prompts.

Assigned Readings.

Assigned readings will be uploaded in PDF form on the NYU LMS (Brightspace) site.

You are responsible for doing *all* of the assigned readings. Some of these readings can be dense or difficult, and they will require careful attention and precision. You will sometimes need to read each reading closely, or even multiple times, to adequately prepare for class.

Grading of Assignments

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

Assignments/Activities	% of Final Grade
Attendance and Participation (Self-Reports)	10%
Reading Response Essays	15%
Midterm Exam	25%
Take-Home Problem Sets	20%
Final Exam	30%

Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Points	Percent
A	4.00	Example: 92.5% and higher
A-	3.67	Example: 90.0 – 92.49%
B+	3.33	Example: 87.5% - 89.99%
B	3.00	Example: 82.5% - 87.49%
B-	2.67	Example: 80% - 82.49%
C+	2.33	Example: 77.5% - 79.99%
C	2.00	Example: 72.5% - 77.49%
C-	1.67	Example: 70% - 72.49%
D+	1.33	Example: 67.5% - 69.99%
D	1.00	Example: 60% - 67.49
F	.00	Example: 59.99% and lower

View Grades

Grades on your assignments will be returned to you when those assignments are graded. You will, ultimately, be responsible for keeping track of your cumulative score in the class, using the grades you receive, and the assignment weightings listed in the syllabus.

Course Schedule

Week/Date	Topic and Reading	Assignments
Week 1 – 8/30 and 9/1	Introduction, Logistics Plato, The Apology	<i>None</i>
Week 2 – 9/6 and 9/8	Plato, Crito Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics (selections)	<i>None</i>
Week 3 – 9/13 and 9/15	Plato, Symposium 172a-198a (to the end of Agathon’s speech) Plato, Symposium 198a-end	Assigned 9/20: First Paper
Week 4 – 9/20	Ibn Sina – <i>The Book of Healing</i> (selections) ‘Floating Man’ Montaigne “That to study philosophy is to learn to die”, “Of Friendship”, “Of Cannibals”;	Due 9/29: First Paper
Week 5 – 9/27 and 9/29	Shakespeare, The Tempest Bertold Brecht – The Life of Galileo	Assigned 10/4: Second paper
Week 6 – 10/11 and 10/13	Kant ‘An answer to the question: what is enlightenment?’ Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto	Due 10/13: Second Paper
Week 7 – 10/18 and 10/20	Catch-up opportunity Midterm Exam	Midterm Exam on 10/20
Week 8 – 10/25 and 10/27	Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, chapters 1-5 Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, chapters 6-11	<i>None</i>
Week 9 – 11/1 and 11/3	Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, chapters 1-10 The Picture of Dorian Gray, chapters 11-20	<i>None</i>
Week 10 – 11/8 and 11/10	Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Illytch Virginia Woolf, A room of one’s own, chapters 1-3	Assigned 11/8: Third Paper
Week 11 – 11/15 and 11/17	A room of one’s own, chapters 3-6 Levi, Survival in Auschwitz, chapters 1-8	Due 11/17: Third Paper
Week 12 – 11/22 and 11/24	Survival in Auschwitz, chapters 9-16 Kurt Vonnegut, Cat’s Cradle, chapters 1-66	<i>None</i>
Week 13 – 11/29 and 12/1	Cat’s Cradle, chapters 66-127 Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, An Absurd Reasoning	Assigned 11/29: Fourth Paper
Week 14 – 12/6 and 12/8	Sisyphus continued, The Absurd Man, Absurd Creation, The Myth of Sisyphus Kafka, The Metamorphosis, Coetzee, The Lives of Animals	Due 12/6: Fourth Paper

Tests and Quizzes

- Midterm Exam: In-class brief written exam consisting of short-answer questions, short essays.
- Final Exam: Untimed Take-Home distributed during Finals period and due at our scheduled final exam time (which is: [[TBD]]).

Course Materials

Required Textbooks & Materials

Required readings and materials will be made available on the NYU LMS (Brightspace) site.

You are responsible for doing *all* of the assigned readings. These readings are dense and difficult and require careful attention and precision. You will typically need to read each reading *at least two* times to adequately understand it.

Course Policies

Public Health Requirements and COVID-19 Student Code of Conduct

You are expected to comply with the COVID-19 Student Code of Conduct, including the requirements for assigned seating, physical distancing and face coverings. Classrooms have been configured accordingly. If you violate the COVID-19 Student Code of Conduct or fail to follow your instructor's related warnings, you may be asked to leave the classroom and/or may be subject to disciplinary action. You may review the Code on [NYU Shanghai's Community Standards page](#).

Attendance and Tardiness

You are expected to “attend” *all* scheduled classes. If you are unable to attend a class, notify me *before* that class.

Late Assignments

Assignments are due **at the date and time indicated on this syllabus**. The late penalty for all assignments is one third of a letter grade per day (an A becomes an A-, etc.). You can contact me in advance to discuss and extension if you think you will not be able to complete an assignment on time. In addition, every student is permitted **two (2)** automatic 48-hour extensions, which will be applied automatically to any assignment submitted late. That is, the first two times you submit an assignment late, you will receive a 48-hour extension before your grade suffers.

Instructional Technology

Email Communication: I will contact you regularly via the NYU LMS (Brightspace) system. You should check for emails from me (reminders, logistics, updates, etc.) at the email address connected to NYU LMS (Brightspace). Please note that I will try to respond to your emails within 24 hours. Do not expect immediate responses to emails sent late at night or on the weekends.

Assignment Notification: All assignments will be posted to our class NYU LMS (Brightspace) site. You are responsible for looking at Brightspace after each class period to learn about the next homework assignment.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

Carefully read NYU Shanghai's *Statement on Academic Integrity* (in the Undergraduate Bulletin). Breaches of academic integrity could result in failure of an assignment, failure of the course, or other sanctions, as determined by the Academic Affairs office.

Disability Disclosure Statement

NYU Shanghai is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. It is NYU Shanghai's policy that no student with a qualified disability be excluded from participating in any NYU Shanghai program or activity, denied the benefits of any NYU Shanghai program or activity, or otherwise subjected to discrimination with regard to any NYU Shanghai program or activity. Any student who needs a reasonable accommodation based on a qualified disability should register with the Moses Center for Student Accessibility for assistance. Students can register online through the Moses Center and can contact the Academic Accommodations Team at shanghai.academicaccommodations@nyu.edu with questions or for assistance.

Title IX Statement

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs. It protects victims of sexual or gender-based bullying and harassment and survivors of gender-based violence. Protection from the discrimination on the basis of sex includes protection from being retaliated against for filing a complaint of discrimination or harassment. NYU Shanghai is committed to complying with Title IX and enforcing University policies prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex. Mary Signor, Executive Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity, serves as the University's Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is a resource for any questions or concerns about sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, or sexual misconduct and is available to discuss your rights and judicial options. University policies define prohibited conduct, provide informal and formal procedures for filing a complaint and a prompt and equitable resolution of complaints.

Links to the Title IX Policy and related documents:

- Sexual Misconduct, Relationship Violence, and Stalking Policy
- Procedures for Complaints Against Students

- Procedures for Complaints Against Employees
- Resource Guide for Students
- Resource Guide for Employees

Academic Resources

Library Support

Library Services

The Library is available to support your research needs. They have access to over 20,000 print resources, 2,000 DVDs, and 1,000 databases (including over a million e-books, as well as streaming audio and video and image databases).

Librarians with expertise in your research topic are available to meet either *in person* or *online* by appointment or by email to help you navigate the research process, from developing a research question and formulating a research strategy, to selecting databases, requesting materials, and citing your sources. Visit shanghai.nyu.edu/library for more information on:

- 24/7 access to e-books, e-journals, streaming media, and databases
- Booking one-on-one consultations for research help
- Asking the Library questions via chat or e-mail

Electronic Reserves

Students can access course readings using their NYU credentials for courses they currently enrolled in at <https://ares.library.nyu.edu/>

Interlibrary Loan Service

For materials not available to you immediately, you can request scanned copies of a book chapter or journal article through our Interlibrary Loan (ILL) service. If you don't know which chapter you need, you can request a Table of Content through ILL.