

GORDON COLLEGE  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

**The Examined Life**

PHI 118 C  
MWF 3:20-4:20  
2013 Fall Semester  
Location: Jenks 226

**Instructor: James Taylor**

e-mail: james.taylor@gordon.edu  
Phone: ex484  
Office: KOSC 344  
Office Hours: TR 3-4:30  
*and by appointment*

**Course Description**

The Examined Life course introduces students to important historical and thematic issues about what it means to be human: Who are we? What is our place in the Cosmos and how do we relate to the natural world around us? What does it mean to find an object or work of art beautiful? What does it mean to live well as opposed to just *living*? What is the best way to live well together as a society of persons? How can we know what is true? And how are we to understand our relationship to God?

At the heart of each of these questions is the assumption that living an "examined life" is a good to be pursued. In addition to asking the above questions, this course will ask whether and why a reflective life is important. Why should we seek to understand who we are, what our place in the cosmos is, and what it means to live well? Finally, what role does philosophy play in such a well-lived life? Does philosophy merely investigate problems and develop fields of knowledge or does it effect a transformation of existence?

This course will investigate these questions by attending to the different forms the examined life has taken throughout Western history. Specifically, we will investigate the ancient, modern, and post-modern forms of the examined life, and we will attend to the changing role and character of philosophy in such a pursuit. With this broad view of the philosophical life in hand, we will ask whether and how philosophy relates to religion, theology and faith.

**Course Goals**

1. To expose students to the broad range of perspectives throughout Western history on what it means to be a human being.
2. To encourage students to think carefully about what constitutes a good life.
3. To provoke students to think about how the philosophical life and the religious life relate to one-another.
4. To enable students to critically evaluate their own often hidden presuppositions that determine their actions and modes of reflection
5. To introduce students to the idea that philosophy can play a formative role in the shaping of character, and therefore in the development and implementation of their own ethical capacities.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Ideally, at the conclusion of this course, students should:

1. Understand the importance of the examined life, in many of its changing manifestations, for the history of the west and for developing their own reflective life.
2. Have learned to read philosophical texts closely and generously—to respect the text as whole—before passing final judgment upon them.
3. Be able to write well-structured, clearly articulated essays about significant philosophical issues.

4. Understand the importance of dialoguing with others both for discerning the significant issues and for coming to an understanding of their own philosophical positions.
5. Have undertaken to constitute their own mode of being through engaging in formative philosophical practices.
6. Have meditated upon and formulated a position as to whether there can be a “Christian philosophy”, and what this philosophy may involve.

**Required Texts**

*Classics of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 0199737290)

*Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 0192804286)

**Grading Overview**

Reading responses	20 %
Class Participation	20%
Exams	30 %
Paper	30 %

**Grading Scale**

93-100	A	80-82	B-	65-69	D
90-92	A-	77-79	C+	<65	F
87-89	B+	73-76	C		
83-86	B	70-72	C		

**Reading Responses**

10 one-page reflections on the upcoming week’s reading assignments are due (roughly) every week on Monday (see schedule below). These reading responses will be composed as follows:

1. Write a two paragraph (¾ page) reflection on **two** philosophically significant aspects of the reading assignment in which you demonstrate a personal understanding of the author’s argument and wager your own evaluation/opinion of the point discussed.
2. At the bottom of the same page, ask **one** philosophically relevant question. This question should deal with what you find to be a significant aspect of the argument considered, and it should serve as a suitable in-class discussion topic.

Each satisfactory reading response will count two percentage points toward the total. (All “good-faith” efforts will receive full credit, while anything less than a full effort will be given whatever grade the professor deems appropriate.)

**Class Participation**

Each class period will include a substantial dialogue about the current reading assignment. Although you will not be forced to speak in class, because our classroom dialogue will be our primary manner of investigating the material, you are strongly encouraged to participate where possible. The success of this class depends upon its members’ interest in and willingness to engage the subject matter under investigation. Thus, classes will often begin with students’ questions. There will also be various in-class writing assignments and informal group presentations that will count toward your participation grade. Class participation is worth a total of 20% of your final grade.

**Exams**

There will be three exams, each worth 10 points toward the total. The exams will reflect both the reading assignments and the class discussion. They will consist of objective questions and short essay interpretive questions. Exams must be taken on the date scheduled (see schedule below).

**Paper**

One 1500 word paper will count 30% toward your final grade. You are required to turn in a rough draft—which will be handed back with comments and directions and will not count toward your final grade—and a final draft that will be graded according to the rubric provided. A comprehensive instruction handout will be distributed. See schedule below for due dates.