HOW SHOULD WE LIVE
PHL 112A
Prof. Ann J. Cahill
Fall 2016, Tues/Thurs, 2:20-4:00

Contact info:
Office: AVRP 111 (in Spence Pavilion in the Academic Village) Campus Box: CB 2340
Phone & email: 278-5703, cahilla@elon.edu
Note: I cancel my office hours with impunity. If you want to make sure that I’ll be there, and available to speak with you, please make an appointment.

Required Texts:


All other required texts will be provided via Moodle, and will be posted on our Moodle site.

Course Description

How should we live? The question presses itself on us in ways both mundane and dramatic: what food should we choose to eat? Does a society have the responsibility to provide housing to its citizens? Is the experience of creating art necessary to a worthwhile human life?

As challenging as these questions are, perhaps more challenging (at least in the usual context of an introductory course at Elon University) is the task of creating a space where the force of those questions, their import and their relevance, is experienced as both urgent and primary. If they are posed as mere puzzles, opportunities for the indifferent exchange of ideas that none of the participants are actually invested in – or, worse yet, only a chance to earn a good grade – then the discussion itself does not matter. To put it another way: we can only engage effectively with the questions of value, of what matters, and of how to live in a way that aligns with our views of what matters, if we have skin in the game.

To think well, we must experience crisis, or tension, or unease – experiences that are mostly considered, in contemporary culture, things to be avoided. In this class, we will attempt to develop together these experiences of discomfort in order to become able to respond to them in more effective, careful ways.

The assumptions of this class, then – or at least some of them! – are as follows:

- As human beings, we consistently face the responsibility of determining how we should live;
- As a discipline that has taken up the question of value consistently and rigorously, philosophy has much to offer in helping us to live out that responsibility in ways that are more conducive to (both individual and collective) human flourishing;
- Our collective task, then, is to hold philosophy accountable to its promise by using the resources it offers (in the form of texts, distinctly philosophical discussions, concepts, and practices) to make decisions about how to live in the world as we find it.
- To undertake this task effectively, we must ground our work in challenges that matter; we must, that is, have skin in the game.
Precisely because of this need to have “skin in the game,” most of our topics and readings will be chosen based on student work and interest. In your group work, for example, I will assign specific readings depending on how your group conversation is developing; and the specific existential challenges at the center of our conversations for much of the semester will be developed by the students.

Course Goals & Objectives

Our most basic goal, as the course description in Elon’s catalog states, is to “ask better questions about how we live so that we can practice those values that will enable us to bring about what is most worthwhile in action, community and in life”.

More specifically, the goals of this course are to:

1. Develop the ability to read philosophical texts carefully, accurately, and fairly;
2. Develop the ability to engage in productive, authentic discussions regarding questions of value and philosophical ideas; and
3. Develop the ability to respond to existential challenges (experiences or challenges that cause or require self-questioning) effectively and confidently, both verbally and in writing.

To achieve these goals, students will do the following:

1. Read a variety of philosophical texts that represent a diversity of approaches to value;
2. Engage in critical, productive discussions with the instructor and your classmates; and
3. Complete a series of assignments, both group and individual, verbal and written, that demonstrate philosophical knowledge and insight with regard to existential challenges.

Assignments

All assignments, unless noted below, should be submitted via our Moodle site. BE CAREFUL: the Moodle assignments are set up to require you to hit the SUBMIT button once more than may seem intuitive. Be sure you hit the submit button and that your assignment has been submitted for grading (and is not just a “draft”).

Annotations/Reflections. Throughout the course, each student will read approximately a wide variety of philosophical texts. These texts can be the basis of two different kinds of assignments: Annotations (which can earn up to 1 pt) and Reflections (which can earn up to 2 pts). For any individual text, you can complete either an Annotation OR a Reflection (not both). You can complete any number and combination of Annotations and Reflections to earn up to (that is, no more than) 20 points. However, you must submit any Annotation or Reflection by the beginning of the class for which you read the text (so if you read, for example, Kant’s “What is Enlightenment?” for Tuesday’s class, the Annotation or Reflection is due by the beginning of Tuesday’s class). No late or retroactive Annotations or Reflections will be allowed. Annotations and Reflections will be graded anonymously. If you submit an Annotation or Reflection and then do not show up for the class for which the text has been assigned, you will not receive any credit for it.

Annotations. Use Concepción’s method of annotation as you’re reading the text. Upload a scan or attach a copy of the annotated text to the Moodle assignment. Your annotation will be evaluated on the degree to which it follows Concepción’s method. Annotations will be graded on the following scale:

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<th>Points</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>The annotation is comprehensive (i.e., all the relevant moves and points are flagged appropriately), insightful (including interesting, provocative, critical questions), and flawless in its use of Concepción’s method. The reader of the annotation is confident that the text has been read carefully, closely, critically, fairly, and with significant levels of philosophical insight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>The annotation is fairly comprehensive (i.e., most of the relevant moves and points are flagged</td>
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appropriately), somewhat insightful (including some interesting, original questions), and strong in its use of Concepción’s method, with only a few errors. The reader of the annotation is confident that the text has been read carefully, closely, critically, and fairly.

0.7 The annotation flags some of the text’s relevant moves and points, but misses others, and includes few interesting, original questions. It uses Concepción’s method inconsistently and makes several errors in doing so. The reader of the annotation is not confident that the text has been read carefully, closely, critically, and fairly.

0 ANY of the following is sufficient to earn a 0 for the assignment:
- The student was absent on the day for which the text was assigned;
- The annotation does not follow Concepción’s method, or uses it in consistently erroneous ways;
- The annotation reflects a poor understanding of the author’s argument;
- The annotation is sparse and misses most of the text’s relevant moves and points;
- The annotation includes no original questions or insights.

Reflections. This response paper should have two distinct sections: one, a very brief (no longer than three sentences) summary of the assigned text; and two, a discussion/analysis of the assigned text. Be sure not to include any summary in the discussion/analysis section. Focus instead on your response to the text: what meaning(s) did you derive from it? How does it connect to or diverge from other texts we’ve explored in class? If you strongly agree or disagree with a text, focus not on the fact that you agree or disagree, but why and how you do. If you find a text puzzling, be specific as to why, and discuss how and why that puzzlement may be relevant to our discussions. These papers will be graded on the following scale:

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<th>Points</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Completes both components of the assignment in a competent, clear manner; develops a strikingly original and insightful discussion of the reading assignment or activity; defends/explains that analysis thoroughly and persuasively; and demonstrates strong, clear, vivid, well-organized writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Completes both components of the assignment in a competent, clear manner; articulates an original analysis of the reading assignment and/or activity; defends/explains that analysis thoroughly and persuasively; and demonstrates strong, clear, well-organized writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Completes both components of the assignment, but one or more of those components is significantly inaccurate, unclear, or sloppily done; or fails to defend/explain the analysis of the text in sufficient detail; or adopts a position that is uncritical or superficial; or contains writing interferes with complete and clear understanding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>ANY of the following is sufficient to earn a 0 for the assignment:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>fails to complete both components of the assignment;</td>
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<td>Demonstrates a weak or nonexistent understanding of the assigned text;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fails to do more than summarize the text or activity in the discussion section; or</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contains writing that renders the assignment incomprehensible.</td>
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Group Work. For several weeks in the middle of our semester, you will be working primarily in groups of 8-10 students. The first task of your group is to determine what kind of philosophical expertise you would like to develop during this section of the class; some groups might choose to develop expertise in a particular school of philosophy (utilitarianism, for example, or critical race theory), while others might choose to study a particular field (for example, bioethics, environmental philosophy, or epistemology). I will help each group to identify a focus for their work, ensuring that developing that particular expertise will assist you in completing the assignments associated with the group work. During the group work weeks, I will assign specific texts to each group, in response to their ongoing discussions. Thus, each group will be reading different texts.
Some assignments related to the group work will be evaluated collectively, while others will be evaluated individually; see the list below. When assignments are evaluated collectively (that is, when the group is graded as a group), I reserve the right to change the group grade for individuals who perform either significantly above or significantly below expectations.

**Individual Assignments.**

- **Existential Essays.** In addition to the Annotations/Responses that each individual student will have the opportunity to write on the texts they are reading (see above), each student is required to write an Existential Essay in response to each of the three existential challenges. These Existential Essays should be relatively short (approximately 2-3 pages), and should utilize the philosophical texts studied in class to develop an insightful, original, compelling response to the existential challenge (each essay should cite at least two and up to five texts). Each Existential Essay will be worth ten points each, for a total of 30 points, and will be evaluated on the clarity of its organization; the strength and clarity of its writing; the accuracy of its representation of the philosophical texts and ideas cited in it; the use of standard citational practices; and the originality, depth, and strength of the central argument. If your paper is chosen as a Curated Existential Essay by another group (see description of Curated Existential Essays below), two points will be added to the grade I assign to your Existential Essay; however, the maximum number of points that you can earn for all three Existential Essays together is 30.

- **Contribution to Group Work.** During the group work phase of the class, I will, on three separate occasions, evaluate your individual contribution to work of the group. The dates of those evaluations are listed on the schedule below. Prior to my evaluating your work, you need to submit (via the Moodle assignment) a brief self-evaluation of your contributions. I also reserve the right to discuss your contributions with other members of your group. Each evaluation will be worth 5 points, for a total of 15 points. Of course, any absences will significantly and negatively affect your evaluation. Generally, your evaluation will be based on the quality and effect of the contributions you make to group discussions, the degree to which you fulfill your responsibilities to the group regarding any group assignments, and the ways in which your contributions help other group members participate effectively.

**Group Assignments.**

- **Process.** Each group will email to me a weekly progress report, which summarizes the work completed in the group that week. Details should include which texts each person read; an evaluation of the quality of the conversations in the group that week; a list of papers written, both collectively and individually (for example, all Annotations/Responses that individual members of the group completed, any Existential Essays written and/or curated, etc.). While these progress reports will not be graded individually (that is, each progress report will not receive an individual grade), I will respond to each of them with my sense of how the group work is progressing, and ways that its process could be improved. A final process grade will be determined at the conclusion of the group work, and will be worth 10 points.

- **Existential Challenges.** As human beings, we encounter challenges that are opportunities (sometimes quite unwelcome!) to question who we are, who we can be, and who we will be. These challenges can take the form of experiences, realizations, new knowledge, quandaries, and unsettling ideas, and often force us to interrogate our values. That is, they impose upon us questions about what matters, and how what matters shapes our responsibilities, our possibilities, and our responses to those challenges. For this assignment, each group is to produce brief (no more than one page, double-spaced) descriptions of two distinct existential challenges. These challenges must represent
authentic problems that resist easy or neat solutions or responses, and they must be realistic. The Existential Challenges will be evaluated based on their level of difficulty, realism, and potential to instigate substantial discussions that can be informed by philosophical texts. They will also be evaluated on the basis of the clarity and organization of their writing. Together, these two Existential Challenges will be worth 5 points; however, if one of the challenges is chosen for the next phase of the class, it will be awarded an extra point.

- **Curated Existential Essays.** After individual Existential Essays have been completed, each group will receive an anonymized group of Existential Essays from another group in the class. The group must then evaluate the Existential Essays, and choose the best one, which will then be assigned as required reading for the whole class. For each Curated Existential Essay, the group must provide a description of the process by which the paper was chosen and a justification for the choice. This assignment will be graded on the quality of the process (was it fair? Did it utilize appropriate criteria, and did it apply them well? Did it provide for the participation of all the group members?) and the quality of the justification of the choice.

**Final Exam.** Your final exam will consist of writing a response to an existential challenge, similar to the Existential Essays that you will write earlier in the class. The only difference in this assignment is that you will be required to cite at least five philosophical texts that we read in this class in your Existential Essay. The final exam will be open book and open note, and will be evaluated based on the clarity of its organization; the strength and clarity of its writing; the accuracy of its representation of the philosophical texts and ideas cited in it; how well-suited the philosophical texts and ideas are to the specific challenge presented; the use of standard citational practices; and the originality, depth, and strength of the central argument. The final exam will be worth 15 points, and will be graded anonymously.

**Other Class Policies**

**Class attendance.** The quality of our work together requires that each member of the class place a high priority on attending each class meeting. If at any time in the semester you miss two classes in a row, or a total of 20% of the class meetings, without a documented explanation, the following consequences will ensue: I will not meet with you outside of class or review any drafts of any assignments. The documented explanation must provide evidence of a severe hardship (medical or other type of emergency) experienced by you or a close family member or observance of a religious holiday as described below. If I accept your documented explanation, the absence is considered excused, and the consequences listed above will not ensue. For any absence, excused or not, the primary responsibility for getting caught up on class discussions and announcements is yours (please do not ask me to summarize entire classes: ask a peer for notes). Note that if you are absent on a day that you pass in an Annotation or Response, regardless of the reason, that assignment will earn no credit. In addition, frequent or consistent absences will have a negative impact on the evaluation of your individual contribution to group work, and may result in an individual reduction of any grades earned by your group (that is, you might receive a lower grade than the rest of the group).

**Late assignments.** Assignments will be penalized by 20% of the total possible points to be earned for each 24 hours the assignment is late (and anything after the stated due date and time is considered late; that is, if you pass in an assignment that was due at the beginning of class two hours late, it is penalized the full 20%; if you pass it in a day and two hours late, it is penalized 40%). Note that this is a very severe penalty: you should avoid handing assignments in late if at all possible. On very rare occasions, I will grant extremely short extensions, but only on the basis of a documented emergency experienced by you or a close family member. Some assignments (such as the annotation/response papers) cannot be handed in late under any circumstances.
**Electronics.** We will discuss as a class the use of electronics (cell phones, laptops) and develop a policy about them together.

**Grading Summary**

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Annotations/Reflections</td>
<td>20 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential Essays</td>
<td>30 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Process (group)</td>
<td>10 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential Challenges (group)</td>
<td>5 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual contribution to group work</td>
<td>15 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curated Existential Essays (group)</td>
<td>5 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>15 pts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100 pts</strong></td>
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**University Policies and Resources**

Most of the language below has been provided by the university. However, I have occasionally made specific points and notes, which are noted with “—AJC”.

**Honor Code**

Elon’s honor pledge calls for a commitment to Elon’s shared values of Honesty, Integrity, Respect and Responsibility. To be clear about what constitutes violations of these values; students should be familiar with code of conduct policies in the student handbook, including violations outlined at [http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/violations/default.xhtml](http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/violations/default.xhtml).

Students with questions about the specific interpretation of these values and violations as they relate to this course should contact me immediately. Violations in academic-related areas will be documented in an incident report which will be maintained in the Office of Student Conduct, and may result in a lowering of the course grade and/or failure of the course with an Honor Code F. (In fact, my policy is that any violation of the honor code results in an immediate grade of “F” for the course. – AJC)

Violations specifically covered by academic honor code policies include: plagiarism, cheating, lying, stealing and the facilitation of another’s dishonesty. Multiple violations will normally result in a student’s temporary suspension from the University.

**Disabilities Services**

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with Disabilities Services in the Duke Building, Room 108 (278-6500), for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs. For more information about Disabilities Services, please visit the website [http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/support/disabilities_services.xhtml](http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/support/disabilities_services.xhtml). (Generally speaking, I am eager to make any accommodations for a documented disability that will increase a student’s access to the learning experience. Please don’t hesitate to speak up! –AJC)

**Writing Center**
Elon’s Writing Center in the Center for Writing Excellence is staffed by trained peer-consultants who can help you with all of your writing projects (for any class or major and for any extracurricular, personal, or professional purposes), so take advantage of this excellent academic resource and include a visit to our Writing Center as part of your own writing process.

http://www.elon.edu/writingcenter

In one-on-one, 45 minute sessions, our consultants will work with you on any kind of writing (such as research or analysis papers, PowerPoint or poster presentations, resumes, or job applications) at any stage of the writing process (such as understanding an assignment; brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing; developing a research question or starting your research; or writing in-text citations and bibliographies/works cited).

We have two multimedia production studios so you can create and work with a consultant on your multimedia and visual texts (such as PowerPoint or Prezi presentations, videos, or websites). Visit our presentation practice room where you can easily record and critique yourself giving a presentation and get feedback from a consultant on your accompanying visuals.

The main Writing Center, located in Belk Library, is open extensive hours:
M-Th 10am-10pm  
Fri 10am-4pm  
Sun 2pm-10pm

The Writing Center also staffs satellite Writing Centers in CREDE and in the Business School (see The Writing Center website for more details).

If you have questions, please contact The Writing Center Director, Dr. Julia Bleakney, at jbleakney@elon.edu or X5642.

Religious Holidays Policies
In supporting religious diversity, Elon has a policy and procedures for students who wish to observe religious holidays that are in conflict with the academic calendar, allowing students an excused absence. Students who wish to observe a holiday during the semester must complete the online Religious Observance Notification Form (RONF), available at the following website within the first two weeks of the semester. http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/religious_life/ReligiousHolidays.xhtml. This policy does not apply during the final examination period. Students are required to make prior arrangements with the instructor for completion of any work missed during the absence. Once the completed RONF is received, the Truitt Center will confirm the excused absence with notification to the instructor and the appropriate academic dean, along with a copy to the student. Students may contact the Truitt Center staff with any questions (336-278-7729).

Student Options Related to Enrollment in This Course
Enrollment
Students should confirm their enrollment in this course through their On-Track account. Students who do not appear on the course roll or do not show the correct course/section listed on On-Track should consult with their instructor immediately.

Policies on Dropping or Withdrawing from this Course
• Students may drop a course during the designated drop/add period through their On-Track account. A course that is dropped during the designated drop/add period will not appear on the student’s transcript or grade report.

• After the designated drop/add period, students may withdraw from a course without penalty through the first half of the semester, following dates published in the academic calendar. Withdrawing from a course during this period will result in a mark of “W” that will appear on the student’s academic transcript. Students may withdraw by using the online process located at http://www.elon.edu/e-web/administration/registrar/DropAddClassesOnline.xhtml

NOTE: Students should not assume that they will be officially withdrawn from a course based on their failing to attend class or their notifying a faculty member of their intent to withdraw. The student has the responsibility for following the official process of withdrawing from a class. Students who do not properly withdraw from a course will receive a grade of F.

• Students may not withdraw from a course after the published deadline. Any exception to this policy is the responsibility of the appropriate academic dean’s office. When granted, withdrawal from a course after this time will result in a grade of “W” or “F” depending on the student’s grade at the time.

For additional information on university course policies, students should consult their Academic Catalog:  http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/catalog/

Class Schedule
The schedule is subject to revisions and changes as necessary. All assignments that are starred [*] are opportunities for Annotations/Reflections (even those that are TBD!). Occasionally there are two assignments for a class day; in that case, you have two opportunities for Annotations/Reflections. Note that Tuesday reading assignments are often longer than Thursday’s, given the increased time between classes; plan accordingly.

8/30: Syllabus; David Concepción, “Reading Philosophy with Background Knowledge and Metacognition”
9/1: Plato, Crito **
9/6: Brookfield and Preskill 1999, chapters 4 and 5; Doorley 2002 “To Thine Own Self Be True” **
9/8: Sartre, “Freedom and Responsibility” (this is a very short reading; read it at least three times) *** and Gordon, “Grown Folks’ Business” ***
9/13: They Say, I Say, pp. xvi-101; Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” **
9/15: They Say, I Say, pp. 105-144; Harbin 2014, “The Disorientations of Acting Against Injustice”**
9/20: Group work; reading assignments TBD **
9/22: Group work; reading assignments TBD **
9/27: Group work; reading assignments TBD **
9/29: Group work; reading assignments TBD **; complete Individual Contribution to Group Work eval #1 assignment on Moodle no later than 5 pm on 9/30 (just a brief paragraph of self-evaluation)
10/4: Group work; reading assignments TBD **
10/6: Group work; reading assignments TBD **
10/11: Group work; reading assignments TBD **
10/13: Group work; reading assignments TBD **; two Existential Challenges due from each group by end of class.

10/18: No class; Fall Break.
10/20: Group work; discuss first Existential Challenge; reading assignments TBD **

10/25: Group work; individual Existential Essays due at beginning of class. Develop process for curating other Existential Essays.

10/27: Group work; Curated Existential Essay assignment #1 due from each group by 5 pm on October 28. Each student must complete Individual Contribution to Group Work eval #2 assignment on Moodle no later than 5 pm on 10/28.

11/1: Group work; read all Curated Existential Essays ** (if you opt to do an Annotation or Reflection, choose one of the Curated Existential Essays as a reading assignment); discuss second Existential Challenge;

11/3: Individual Existential Essay #2 due at beginning of class; revise curating process if necessary; Curated Existential Essay assignment #2 due from each group at 5 pm on November 4.

11/8: Group work; read all Curated Existential Essays ** (if you opt to do an Annotation or Reflection, choose one of the Curated Existential Essays as a reading assignment); discuss third Existential Challenge.

11/10: Individual Existential Essay #3 due at beginning of class; revise curating process if necessary; Curated Existential Essay assignment #3 due from each group at 5 pm on November 11.

11/15: Discuss final batch of Curated Existential Essays; however, there will be an additional reading assignments TBD **, and that should be used for any Annotation or Reflection assignment, not a Curated Existential Essay. For the rest of the semester, reading assignments will be designed to prepare students for the final exam, and will be discussed as a whole class. Note: Students should complete “process” assignment (this just consists of attaching the group’s progress reports to the Moodle assignment, no additional writing) and the Individual Contribution to Group Work assignment #3 on Moodle by the start of today’s class.

11/17: Reading assignments TBD **

11/22: No class (Thanksgiving break)
11/24: No class (Thanksgiving break)

11/29: Reading assignments TBD **
12/1: Reading assignments TBD **

12/6: Reading assignments TBD **
12/8: Reading assignments TBD **

Our final exam will be held on Wednesday, December 14, from 1-4 pm.