

# The Examined Life

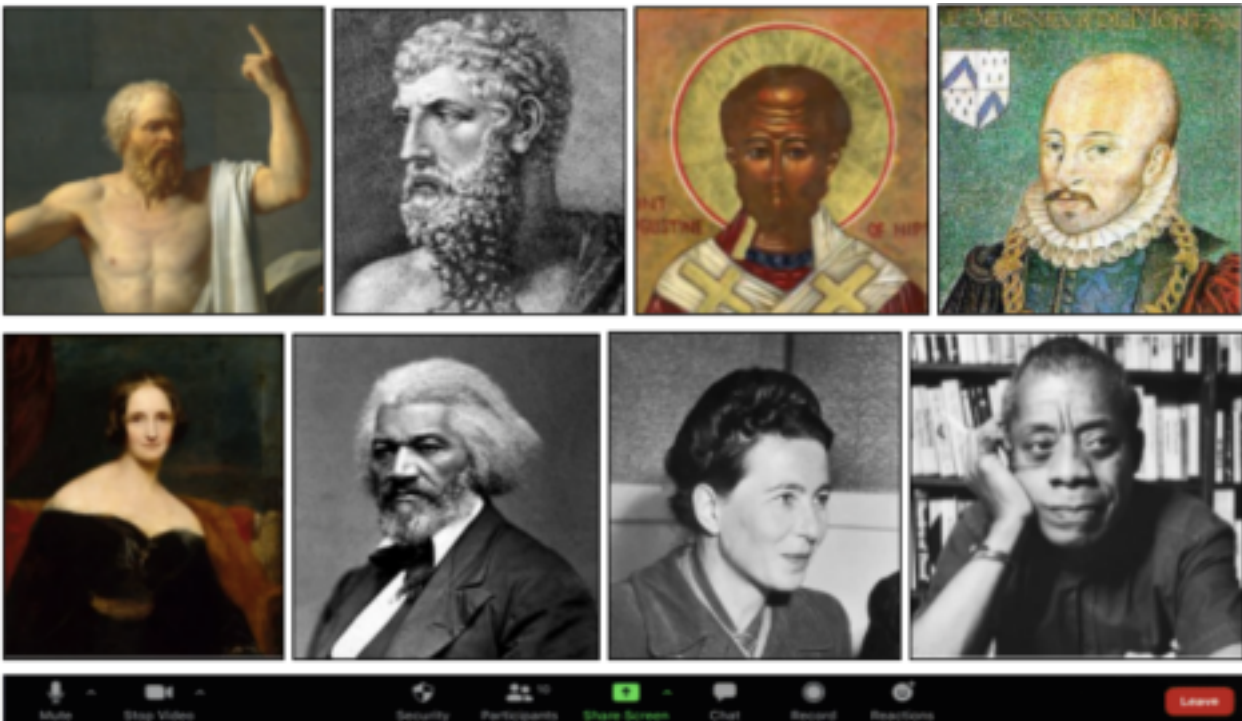
CORE 105.015

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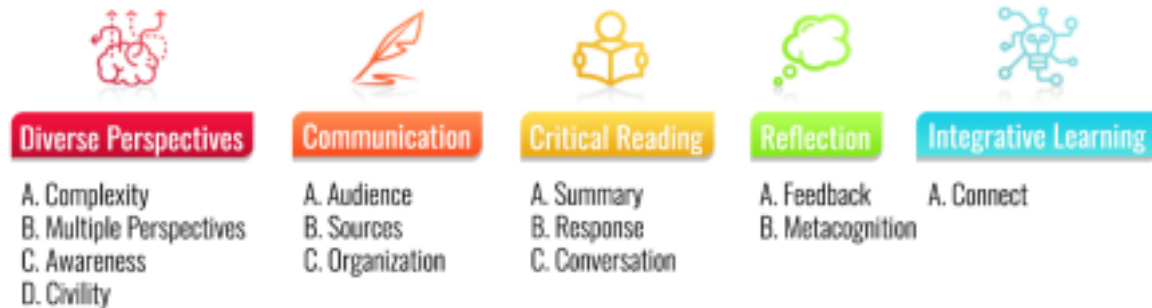
Program Leader: Audrey Perotti, [ap0332a@american.edu](mailto:ap0332a@american.edu)



Human beings have fundamental beliefs about the world and themselves, beliefs that shape and distort what they see about the world and themselves. But how do we know that those beliefs are correct or good? Can we know whether they are correct or good, or is it all just relative? To take up these questions is to try to lead the examined life. In this class we will study notable figures who, each in their own way, exemplify the examined life. As we go, we will practice the skills of interpreting morally complicated texts and engaging in dialogue with perspectives that are not our own.

## Complex Problems Learning Outcomes

Your Complex Problems seminar uses scholarly methods of inquiry—like diverse perspectives, critical reading, communication, reflection, and integrative learning—to study multi-faceted real-world problems or enduring questions. The content of your seminar is designed as a vehicle for learning and practicing those methods of inquiry, which are the course's learning outcomes. These outcomes will help you to enact your curiosity and cultivate intellectual flexibility in preparation for future work at the university and beyond.



### Required Texts:

- *Four Texts on Socrates*. Ed. and trans. by West and West (Cornell)
- Augustine, *Confessions*. Trans. by Sarah Ruden (Modern Library)
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life* (Dover)
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818 Edition) (Oxford Worlds Classics)
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. Trans. by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier (Vintage)

Other class texts are available on Canvas.

**Note:** Because this class is part of the **Lincoln Scholars Certificate program**, and thanks to generous support from the **School of Public Affairs**, you will be provided with a copy of each course text **free** of charge.

### Course Requirements and Expectations:

1. You are expected to attend all class sessions. Unless the university changes its policy, our class will meet in person at the time and in the room assigned by the university. Missed classes without an explanation will count against your participation/attendance grade.
2. You are expected to complete the reading assignments listed for a given day in class before you come to class for that day. Be aware that these texts are difficult and require close attention. Plan on reading these texts more than once, including *after* the class in which the text is discussed.
3. Bring your text with you to class, since we will be referring to, and reading together, passages from the text.

4. Come to class prepared to participate actively and thoughtfully in every class. Please turn off or put away your phone in the class. Laptops are discouraged in class, unless you have a documented learning need (please see me to discuss).

### **Classroom Courtesy**

Classroom courtesy is an essential component of creating an effective learning environment. All students have the right to learn without unnecessary distractions. These distractions include: cell phones, talking while others are speaking, reading newspapers, falling asleep, etc. If you need a cell phone for emergency purposes, leave it on vibrate. Laptop use is also restricted. Unless you have a documented learning need, do not bring a laptop to class. Entering and leaving are also significant sources of distraction. It is your responsibility to be on time and to stay for the entire period. In circumstances where you need to leave early, me beforehand and sit near the exit. Repeated disruptions of class will lead to a reduction in your final grade.

Most importantly, class discussions related to race, violence, and many other topics that we will discuss can lead to strong feelings and heated debate. Because this is a college classroom, all discussion must be respectful and scholarly.

### *Scholarly Comments*

- are respectful of diverse opinions and open to follow up questions and/or disagreement
- are related to class and/or the course material
- focus on advancing the discussion about issues related to the course and/or course material rather than personal beliefs, and
- are delivered in normal tones and a non-aggressive manner.

### *Unacceptable Comments*

- are personal in nature. This includes attacks on a person's appearance, demeanor, or political beliefs.
- include interrupting the instructor or other students and not allowing people to speak.
- often use the discussion to argue for political positions and/or beliefs. If political discussions arise, they must be discussed in a scholarly way (see above).
- may include using raised tones, yelling, engaging in arguments with other students and being threatening in any manner.
- include ignoring the instructor's authority to maintain the integrity of the classroom environment.

**Grading:** Your final grade will be calculated on the basis of your grades on these assignments:

Percentage of the Final Grade

Participation/attendance	10%
Leading class discussions (with a partner)	20%
Mid-semester meeting	5%
Mid-term exam	20%
Reading Quizzes	10%
Paper with Draft	
Draft	5%
Final Paper	20%
Final Exam	10%

Please see the attached Schedule of Assignments for details about due dates and expectations for your assignments.

**Important Note about Grades for This Class:** According to university policy, you must earn *at least a C* in the class to use this class to fulfill the requirements of the AU Core or the Lincoln Scholars Program. That means: if you do not get a C or above in this class, you will have to take another Complex Problems class. Turning in ALL the assignments is a necessary but not sufficient condition for getting a C grade or higher. That is, if you fail to turn in all the assignments, you will not be able to get a C or higher; but getting all your assignments in is not a guarantee of getting a C or higher; that depends on the quality of your work.

**The Lincoln Scholars Program:** The Examined Life fulfills a requirement for the Lincoln Scholars Certificate Program. Lincoln Scholars is a 15 credit certificate program in liberal education for first and second year students at AU. The program aims to encourage intellectual and political diversity on campus by reading morally complicated texts in small conversation-based seminars. The program is a core texts program and uses classic and contemporary texts in political theory, philosophy, literature, and economics. You are eligible to apply to the program; the deadline for this semester is October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022. If you have questions or would like to apply to the program, please contact Professor Thomas Merrill at [merrill@american.edu](mailto:merrill@american.edu).

**Office Hours:** I am available to meet with you outside of class in person or via Zoom. My office is SIS 208 (In the SIS building on second floor overlooking the Davenport coffee lounge) and I will regularly be available on Tuesdays from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm and in the afternoon on Wednesdays from 1 to 3. You can make an appointment with me through the Calendly app (<https://calendly.com/josephyoung>).

**Co-Curricular Activities:** As part of this class, there will be three co-curricular activities, organized by our Program Leader. These are intended to help you get to know your classmates in a more social setting and to help bridge the gap between our classroom work and our everyday lives. For this class, we intend to visit Frederick Douglass's house in Anacostia, watch a classic movie version of *Frankenstein*, and have one social event. *Please note:* the co-curricular activities are part of our work together and it is strongly recommended that you participate.

**Program Leader:** The Program Leader for this class is **Audrey Perotti**. Audrey will organize

the co curriculars for this class and will be available for you to answer your questions about class and our work together.

**Policy on Masks in the Classroom:** As you know, our community is still trying to get back to normal in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this class, we will follow the university's Health and Safety Directive on Face Coverings, which is available on the AU website.

**Attendance Policy:** It is not possible to accomplish the learning outcomes for this class without regular attendance; in view of this, you should plan to attend every class meeting. Please keep the following in mind:

- According to American University's Undergraduate Regulations, "Excused absences include major religious holidays (posted annually by the Office of the Provost and Kay Spiritual Life Center or verified by the Kay Spiritual Life Center as an excused absence for religious observance), medical or mental health events, approved disability-accommodation-related absences, and approved varsity athletic team events." For an absence to be excused, students must supply proper documentation (or notice in the case of a religious obligation) in a timely manner. To preserve student privacy, **only the Dean of Students Office** can provide documentation for absences due to mental-health or medical issues.
- Unexcused absences are all other instances of your non-attendance. More than three unexcused absences may be grounds for course failure.
- Excessive absences, excused or unexcused, can change the nature of the course so that it is impossible for you to achieve the learning outcomes. In these cases, faculty and students should consult about options, including withdrawal, medical leave, or course failure.

**Academic Integrity Code:** All students are required to follow the University's Academic Integrity Code. If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with the standards and requirements of the University's Academic Code of Conduct. Violations of the Code of Conduct will not be tolerated and will be reported appropriately. You can find more information about the University's Academic Integrity Code here:

<https://www.american.edu/policies/students/upload/academic-integrity-code-2020-2-2.pdf>

**Discrimination and Harassment:** American University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy or parenting, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information or any other bases under applicable federal and local laws and regulations (collectively "Protected Bases") in its programs and activities. The University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and stalking.

If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with the: Assistant Vice President for Equity and Title IX Officer

Office of Equity and Title IX

Phone: 202-885-8080

Email: [TitleIX@american.edu](mailto:TitleIX@american.edu) for complaints and reports for sexual misconduct;  
[equityoffice@american.edu](mailto:equityoffice@american.edu) for complaints and reports for other discrimination.

- Please keep in mind that all faculty and staff – with the exception of counselors in the Counseling Center, staff in the Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center – who are aware of or witness this conduct are required to report this information to the university, regardless of the location of the incident.
- For more information, including a list of supportive resources on and off-campus, contact – Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence (OASIS), Health Promotion & Advocacy Center; 202-885-7070; [OASIS@american.edu](mailto:OASIS@american.edu); [www.american.edu/ocl/OASIS](http://www.american.edu/ocl/OASIS)

**Emergency Planning:** In an emergency, AU will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for an extended period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and/or Canvas, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (<http://www.american.edu/emergency/>) and the AU information line at 202-885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college-specific information.

**Academic Support and Access Center:** The Academic Support and Access Center supports the academic development and educational goals of all American University students and is committed to providing access for individuals with disabilities within the university's diverse community.

Location: Mary Graydon Center (MGC), Room 243 202-885-3360 [asac@american.edu](mailto:asac@american.edu) M–Th: 9am–7pm & F: 9am–5pm Website: <http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/>

## **Class Schedule:**

### **Week 1: Intro, What is the Examined Life? Rules of the Game.**

#### **8/31: Introduction**

- Parfit, "Principle of Charity"\*
- Merrill, "Rules for Reading"\*
- Lukianoff and Haidt, "The Coddling of the American Mind"
- Watch: Cornel West and Robert George,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5dVnAIcYrU&t=11s>
- Plato, *Apology* 17a-27e (p. 63-72)

### **Week 2**

#### **9/7: Plato, Socrates, The Examined Life**

- Plato, *Apology*, 28a-35d (p. 73-89)
- Plato, *Apology*, 36a-42a (p. 89-97)

### **Week 3**

#### **9/14: Is the Examined Life Dangerous?**

- Aristophanes, *Clouds*, lines 1-632 (p. 115-41)
- Aristophanes, *Clouds*, lines 633-1511 (p. 141-76)

*Recommended Movie:* The Matrix

### **Week 4**

#### **9/21: What is the meaning of life?**

- Augustine, *Confessions*, Books I, II, and X (in part) (p. 3-50, 276-81)
- Augustine, *Confessions*, Books III-IV (p. 51-104)

## **Week 5**

### **9/28: What is the role of God in the Examined Life? The Other?**

- Augustine, *Confessions*, Books V-VI (p. 103-66)
- Augustine, *Confessions*, Books VIII-IX (p. 203-75)
- Montaigne, *Essays*, “Of Cannibals” (p. 150-59)
- Montaigne, *Essays*, “Of Experience” (p. 815-57)

## **Week 6**

### **10/5: Can one live the Examined Life if they are not free?**

- Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, Chapters 1-9 (p. 1-34)
- Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, Chapters 10-11, Appendix (p. 34-76)
- Douglass, “What, to the American Slave, is your 4<sup>th</sup> of July” (188-206) Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n69j6UnUz64>

## **Week 7**

### **10/12: Can one have false beliefs and live an Examined Life?**

- Saslow, Eli. 2016. “The White Flight of Dereck Black.” *Washington Post*.
- Watch PBS Interview with Dereck Black. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/derek-black-grew-up-as-a-white-nationalist-heres-how-he-changed-his-mind>
- **Midterm exam**

## **Week 8**

### **10/19: What role does violence play in an Examined Life?**

- Hannah Arendt, “Eichmann in Jerusalem I”
- Malcom X, “The Ballot or the Bullet”
- Martin Luther King, “Letter From a Birmingham Jail”
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Nonviolence as Compliance”



- Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth “Why Civil Resistance Works”

## **Week 9**

### **10/26: To live an Examined Life, what ways of thinking are natural vs. conventional?**

- de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Volume 1: Introduction; Part 1, Chapter 1 Volume 2: first page (p. 3-17, 44-48, 283)
- de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Volume 1: Part 2, Chapter 1, Chapter 5 Part 3, Chapter 1 (selections) (p. 71-75, 148-56, 159-87)

## **Week 10**

### **11/2: No Class at AU – Co-Curricular event**

## **Week 11**

### **11/9: How do we determine the truth? Is it all relative or is it universal?**

- de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Volume 2: Part 2, Chapters 5-6 (p. 522-23, 524-43, 566-70)
- de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Conclusion (p. 753-66)

## **Week 12**

### **11/16: Does the Examined Life lead you to Happiness?**

Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Book I (p. 5-62)

Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Book II (p. 63-111)

## **Week 13**

### **11/23: NO CLASS Thanksgiving**

## **Week 14**

### **11/30: How do monsters help us consider the Examined Life?**

- Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Book III (p. 113-72)
- Jeffrey Cohen-Monster Culture (Seven Theses)
- Dan Drezner-Theory of International Politics and Zombies
- Joe Young, Poli-scifi. <https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2012/07/13/poli-sci-fi/>

## **Week 15**

### **12/7: Review and Conclusion**

- Haidt et al. *Moral Foundations Theory: The Pragmatic Validity of Moral Pluralism*
- Sign up for yourmorals.org
- Take the Quiz/Questionnaire and be ready to discuss

## **Week 16**

### **12/14: Final Exam**