The unexamined life is not worth living.
—Socrates

You must understand that none of the gods are seekers after truth. They do not long for wisdom, because they are wise—and why should the wise be seeking the wisdom that is already theirs? Nor, for that matter, do the ignorant seek the truth or crave to be made wise. And indeed, what makes their case so hopeless is that, having neither beauty, nor goodness, nor intelligence, they are satisfied with what they are, and do not long for the virtues they have never missed.
—Plato

What would we say of a musician who would be content to read music manuals yet would never play? Many philosophers are admired for their syllogisms but contradict themselves in their lives.
—Polémon

We cannot learn philosophy; for where is it, who is in possession of it, and how shall we recognize it? We can only learn to philosophize, that is, to exercise the talent of reason, in accordance with its universal principles, on certain actually existing attempts at philosophy, always, however, reserving the light of reason to investigate, to confirm, or to reject these principles in their very sources.
—Immanuel Kant

In the course of this semester, we will become better acquainted with certain elements of the Western philosophical tradition. We shall do this through engaging in critical thought concerning questions with which philosophy has long been occupied. Such questions include: What is the nature of reality? How is this reality known? Is knowledge possible? What constitutes a good, indeed the best, life for a human being? What is the best way to collectively organize ourselves and to regulate the relations between us? Our approach to these questions will be historical. We will examine what philosophers have said on these questions; why they have made the claims they make; and whether they have good reasons for making these claims.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Republic, Plato (Hackett Publishing)
Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle (Hackett Publishing)
Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, René Descartes (Hackett Publishing)
An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, David Hume (Hackett Publishing)
Philosophy as a Way of Life, Pierre Hadot (Blackwell Publishers)
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your success in this class will depend upon regular class attendance—which involves more than your physical presence—as well as keeping up on the assigned reading. However, while regular class attendance and sustained reading of the assigned material are necessary conditions for success, they are not sufficient conditions for your success. The material that we will engage is not something that can be mastered by oneself nor can it be learned without patient and sustained attention. Thus, listening attentively to lectures and videos, actively participating in the process of asking and answering questions—those of the authors we will read, those of your classmates, as well as your own—and taking the time to reflect upon what you have read and heard will also be required if you are to get the most out of this class and the material that will engage us.

Your progress in this class will be assessed in several ways. There will be two exams—one midterm and the other at the end of the semester. Both exams will be a take-home exams. Each exam will determine 20% of your final grade. These will be essay exams. The material for these exams will be drawn from the assigned readings, from lectures, and from videos that we will watch in class.

In addition to these exams, there will be frequent, unannounced quizzes. These quizzes will cumulatively account for 20% of your final grade. These quizzes will not require mastery of the assigned readings, but will expect a familiarity that can only be gained from a close and patient reading of the texts.

Finally, you will keep a meditative journal throughout the course of the semester. This journal will account for 40% of your final grade. This journal is to facilitate an appreciation of the Socratic dictum: the unexamined life is not worth living. You are expected to bring this journal to class every day. I will randomly check to see that you are writing regularly in this journal, and at the end of the term you will turn in this journal.

No late work will be accepted. Nor will there be an opportunity for extra credit.

NOTE

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students, 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department chair, or the Affirmative Action Office (487-3310).
What is it to which the word "thinking" gives a name? We hear the words "think," "thought," "thinking." As the saying goes, we attach a meaning to them. What comes to our minds here is at first fleeting and blurred. Most of the time, we can leave it at that. It satisfies the demands of common speech in usual communication. Such communication does not want to lose time tarrying over the sense of individual words. Instead, words are constantly thrown around on the cheap, and in the process are worn out. There is a curious advantage in that. With a worn-out language everybody can talk about everything.

—Martin Heidegger

PROPOSED READING SCHEDULE

Week One:
1. January 11: Introduction to the Course
2. January 13: Introduction to Philosophy

Week Two:
1. January 18: Plato—Precursors and Historical Context
2. January 20: Plato—Republic, 327-354c

Week Three:
1. January 25: Plato—Republic, 368c-376c, 414b-417b

Week Four:
1. February 1: Plato—Republic, 484-511e
2. February 3: Plato—Republic, 514-521b (514-541b)

Numerous are they who are entirely absorbed in a militant politics, preparing for the social revolution. Rare, very rare are they, who in order to prepare for the revolution, want to make themselves worthy of it.”

—G. Friedmann

Week Five:
1. February 8: Plato on Advertising: “The Ad and the Ego”
2. February 10: WINTER CARNIVAL

Week Six:
1. February 15: Aristotle—Nicomachean Ethics, 1094a-1096a10, 1097a15-1103a10
2. February 17: Aristotle—Nicomachean Ethics, 1103a10-1108b35, 1109b30-1115a5

Week Seven:
1. February 22: Aristotle—Nicomachean Ethics, 1129a-1130a15, 1131a10-1143b15
2. February 24: Aristotle—Nicomachean Ethics, 1176a30-1181b25

Week Eight:
2. March 3: Take-Home Exam Due

SPRING BREAK
Public opinion today cherishes the notion that the thinking of thinkers must be capable of being understood in the same way as the daily newspaper. That all men cannot all follow the thought processes of modern theoretical physics is considered quite in order. But to learn the thinking of thinkers is in essence much more difficult, not because this thinking is still more involved but because it is simple—too simple for the easy fluency of common notions.

—Martin Heidegger

Week Nine:
1. March 15: A Fracturing of the Sphere of Culture
2. March 17: The Transition from the Pre-modern to the Modern

Week Ten:
1. March 22: Descartes—Discourse on Method, pp. 1-22 (pp. 23-44 *)

Week Eleven:
1. March 29: Hume—Enquiry, pp. 37-53 (pp. 72-90*)
2. March 31: Hadot—“Philosophy as a Way of Life” (pp. 264-276)

Week Twelve:
1. April 5: Mindwalk
2. April 7: Mindwalk

Week Thirteen:
1. April 12: Hadot—“Spiritual Exercises” (pp. 81-125)
2. April 14: Hadot—“The Figure of Socrates” & “Marcus Aurelius” (pp. 147-205)

Week Fourteen:
1. April 19: Hadot—“The Sage and the World” (pp. 251-263)
2. April 21: Adorno—“Free Time” ***Meditative Journals Due***

FINALS WEEK:
1. April 26: FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE

* for the truly ambitious