

What does it mean to live a good life?

Six Philosophical Approaches

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What does it mean to live well? How can we live a good life and be happy? What makes life meaningful? In this lecture series, join philosophy lecturer Kyla Bruff to examine the different approaches six philosophers have taken to answering the question of the good life: Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Jan Patočka. Each philosopher's particular take on living the good life will be described and then related to the contemporary situation. We will end the series by evaluating which conceptions of the good life along with their corresponding demands could be most relevant and helpful to us today.

Over the course of six weeks, we will examine six different accounts of the good life in the history of philosophy with the view of applying them to everyday living. We will begin and end with Plato's thesis that caring for yourself as an individual involves pursuing the truth collectively with others. Beginning with the trial of Socrates in Athens as recounted in Plato's Apology, we will first examine the importance of caring for the soul, dialogue, and lifelong education in living the good life. We will then work through the importance of moderation, virtue and friendship, according to Aristotle, for living a virtuous life.

In trying to live well, many people find it necessary to discipline themselves to behave in accordance with duties and the principles they establish for themselves. We will explore this approach to the good life with the help of the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant. In carrying out their moral duty, a good person, on Kant's account, legislates their own rational principles to guide their action. For Kant, living the good life involves a high level of self-control. Nietzsche, on the other hand, critiques this endorsement of self-constraint, together with the claims that our decisions on how to live well should follow the strict principles of reason or those of religion. For Nietzsche, who we will study in our fourth week, to live a good life means both to affirm life but also to suffer in solitude on the journey to self-improvement.

In our fifth session, drawing on the work of Martha C. Nussbaum's work, we will evaluate the role of emotions in making judgments about what is important for our well-being. Through emotions, we expose our own vulnerability and neediness with regards to others and the world. The involvement of others in the process of living a good life culminates in our study of Jan Patočka's political reading of Plato's care for the soul. Patočka emphasizes that caring for your soul involves pursuing justice in the community with others. We live our best lives when we are engaged in vulnerable, genuine dialogue and activity with other people.

Schedule of topics:

Week 1 (Plato):

Textual basis: Plato's *Apology*

Theme: Being just to others and the role of education in caring for ourselves.

Point of exploration: How ignorance in the context of fake news fails to improve well-being and our relations to others.

Week 2 (Aristotle):

Textual basis: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books II and VIII

Theme: Moderation in action (the "mean between extremes") and friendship.

Point of exploration: Do we need friendship to live a good life?

Week 3 (Immanuel Kant):

Textual basis: Kant, *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

Theme: Self-discipline and the rationally-motivated good will.

Point of exploration: What level of self-control should we exercise with regards to our online behaviour?

Week 4 (Friedrich Nietzsche):

Textual basis: Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Theme: The affirmation of life and the value of suffering in solitude

Point of exploration: When should we forgo rationality and take risks in our decision-making?

Week 5 (Martha C. Nussbaum):

Textual basis: Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value" in *Upheavals of Thought*

Theme: The role of emotions and vulnerability in making judgments about living a good life.

Point of exploration: The role of our neediness and dependency on others in the world.

Week 6 (Jan Patočka):

Textual basis: Patočka – *The Care of the Soul in the City: Politeia, in Plato and Europe*

Theme: The political significance of caring for yourself and others.

Point of exploration: What are the conditions of dialogue with others such that we can collectively nurture each individual's possibility to determine their own concept of the good life.