

1000-E26;The Good Life - Class B

[Spring til i dag](#)

 Rediger

The Good Life

University of Copenhagen

Fall Semester 2026

Class Meetings: Tuesdays 1:15PM-3:30PM

University of Copenhagen, South Campus, KUA3, **NOTICE NEW ROOM:** 6B.0.22

Course Instructor: Cæcilie Varslev-Pedersen, PhD, Teaching Associate Professor, the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen

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Course content:

In this course, we examine the foundations of 'the good life' as they surface in Danish and French philosophy of existence, with a particular focus on human freedom and the search for meaning, fulfillment, and happiness.

Our course takes us into the minds of 19th and 20th-century European thinkers, writers, and artists, like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Beauvoir, Camus, and Fanon, who were deeply troubled by the existential conditions of despair, anxiety, and meaninglessness, but who also saw these trials as occasions to examine how we live. With them, we inquire into our relationships, activities, and commitments. And we ask whether freedom is key to happiness, and, if so, the freedom to do what? What makes a life well-lived? All of these philosophers, in their own ways, turned towards nature and the outdoors as a place to clear their minds from the stresses of human social life and reconnect with the world around them. We will also look at how art and the aesthetic realm could be both an expression of and an escape from alienation and meaninglessness. We may not all come to a common agreement on life's purpose, but, together, we do partake in an age-old pilgrimage in search of the good life.

Learning Objectives: Together, we will be aiming to: (1) enter into dialogue with European philosophical, literary, and artistic traditions that have grappled with existential questions; (2) acquire academic skills in navigating and interpreting philosophical works, fiction and artworks;

(3) develop abilities in nuancing and articulating our own views and positions in dialogue with those of others; and (4) relate our particular lived experience of the search for the good life to universal philosophical concepts that elucidate the human condition.

Language of instruction and discussion: English. (Papers, however, may also be written in Danish, Swedish, Norwegian).

Requirements for DIS-students

For undergraduate students (bachelor students)

Active attendance (at least attendance in 75% of the sessions documented by protocol). DIS must be notified, if you are absent two times or more. The syllabus volume and content are determined by the teacher, and two papers are to be submitted to the teacher of each 9,600-12,000 characters (including spaces), i.e. 4-5 pages (1.5 line spacing), as well as a final major assignment, which has a size of 19,200-24,000 characters (including spaces), i.e. 8-10 pages (1.5 line spacing), and based on 400-500 pages of literature. Due date: TBA.

Requirements for KU-students (both Danish students and Exchange students)

For undergraduate students (bachelor students)

Active attendance (at least attendance in 75% of the sessions documented by protocol).

A final major assignment, which has a size of 24.000-28.800 characters (including spaces), i.e. 10-12 pages (1.5 line spacing), and based on 600-800 pages literature in agreement with the teacher. The teacher must approve the subject and literature. The assignments is assessed by the teacher and a grade is given in accordance with the 7-point grading scale. For KU students, the due is TBA.

For graduate students (kandidat/master students)

Active attendance (at least attendance in 75% of the sessions documented by protocol).

A final paper of 36.000-48.000 characters (including spaces), i.e. 15-20 pages (1.5 line spacing), and based on 800-1000 pages of literature in agreement with the teacher. The teacher must approve the subject and literature. The assignment is assessed by the teacher, and a grade is given in accordance with the 7-point grading scale. For KU students, the due date is TBA.

Readings: Completion of reading assignments as scheduled is required and is a prerequisite for participating in class discussions.

Lectures and discussion: In general, class will be a combination of lecture, group work and class discussion. Class participation includes attendance, student presentations, and contributions that students make in discussion posts and in class.

Plagiarism: Any student who plagiarizes will fail the course.

The use of generative AI is not permitted in this course.

Grading Breakdown (DIS students):

Research paper: 45%

First short paper: 20%

Second short paper: 20%

Attendance: 15%

Course Texts:

Most readings will be made available in electronic form, but a few you will have to buy (KU students) or pick up at the DIS library (DIS students). Always check exactly what to prepare for class under Modules. I strongly prefer that you print out all texts in electronic form and bring them to class.

- Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. London: Penguin Classics, 2020 (selections)
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. New York: Open Road, 2018 (selections, hard copy/book).
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011 (selections, handout).
- Brinkmann, Svend. "Living Well and Living Right". In Hill et al. *Critical Happiness Studies*. Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2020, pp. 131-143 (handout).
- Camus, Albert. *The First Man*. London: Penguin Books, 2001 (selections).
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus* (selections, handout).
- Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. London: Penguin Books, 2020 (selections).
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*: Pluto Books 1968 (selections, handout).
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*.
- Gosetti-Ferencei, Jennifer Anna. *On Being and Becoming: An Existentialist Approach to Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021 (selections, handout).
- Hadot, Pierre. "Only the Present is Our Happiness." In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or*, I and II. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987 (selections, handout).
- Kierkegaard, Søren. "Gilleleie" Fragment (handout).

- Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016 (selections, handout).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. London: Penguin Books, 1993 (selections, hard copy, study tour reading).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, "The Parable of the Mad Man," from *The Gay Science* (Cambridge UP, 2001).
- Nietzsche Friedrich, *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*" (selection; handout).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. London: Penguin, 2003 (selections, hard copy, study tour reading)

Books:

[https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/%24CANVAS COURSE REFERENCE%24/file_ref/gc091475ddcwrap=1](https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/%24CANVAS%20COURSE%20REFERENCE%24/file_ref/gc091475ddcwrap=1)

These books should be purchased (For KU students) They should be arriving very soon in Academic Books on campus, where you get a 20% student discount):

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) ISBN 0-8065-0160-X
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy - Out of the Spirit of Music* (2003), 9780140433395
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (2003) ISBN 9780140441185

For DIS students:

DIS students should pick up their texts at the DIS Library, Vestergade 23 during the first two weeks of the semester.

In addition to the three mentioned books, DIS students can also pick up Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, and Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. These will be provided as pdfs for KU students to be printed out.

For DIS students:

Please make sure to read the "Academic Regulations" on the DIS website. There you will find regulations on:

- Course Enrollment and Grading
- Attendance
- Coursework, Exams, and Final Grade Reports

Oversigt over fag:

Dato	Nærmere oplysninger	Forfalder
tirs 25. Aug 2026	 <u>Session I Introduction: The Good Life in Modernity -- Between Happiness and Morality</u> (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259177&include_contexts=course_95197) 	13.15 til 15.30
tirs 1. Sep 2026	 <u>Session II Existence Precedes Essence--What is Existential Philosophy?</u> (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259178&include_contexts=course_95197) 	13.15 til 15.30
tirs 15. Sep 2026	 <u>Session III Aristotle and the Leading a Good Life in Ancient Greece</u> (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259182&include_contexts=course_95197) 	13.15 til 15.30
tirs 22. Sep 2026	 <u>Session IV A Good Life Gone Awry: Kierkegaard's Critique of the Aesthetic</u> (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259186&include_contexts=course_95197) 	13.15 til 15.30
tors 24. Sep 2026	 <u>Paper one (DIS only)</u> (https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/95197/assignments/269726) 	forfalder 23.59
tirs 29. Sep 2026	 <u>Session V The Good Life as the Ethical Life? Kierkegaard on the Ethical (and the Religious)</u> (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259179&include_contexts=course_95197) 	13.15 til 15.30
tirs 13. Okt 2026	 <u>Session VI Nietzsche and the Aesthetic Overcoming of Suffering</u> (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259183&include_contexts=course_95197) 	13.15 til 15.30
tirs 20. Okt 2026	 <u>Session VII Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra -- Towards an affirmation of (the good) life?</u> (https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259210&include_contexts=course_95197) 	13.15 til 15.30

Dato	Nærmere oplysninger	Forfalder
tirs 27. Okt 2026	 Session VIII Freud and Perennial Unhappiness https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259187&include_contexts=course 95197	13.15 til 15.30
tirs 10. Nov 2026	 Session IX Is Life Absurd or Ambiguous? -- Camus vs. Beauvoir https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259217&include_contexts=course 95197	13.15 til 15.45
tirs 17. Nov 2026	 Session X Freedom as the Basis of a Good Life: Simone de Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity II https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259185&include_contexts=course 95197	13.15 til 15.30
tirs 24. Nov 2026	 Session XI The Good Life and Political Emancipation -- Is Existentialism of Any Use? https://absalon.instructure.com/calendar?event_id=259184&include_contexts=course 95197	13.15 til 14.30
tors 10. Dec 2026	 Final paper (DIS students) https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/95197/assignments/269725	forfalder 23.59
fre 11. Dec 2026	 Office Hours December 12	opgaveliste: 10:00
	 Attendance https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/95197/assignments/269721	
	 Discussion post info https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/95197/assignments/269722	
	 Final Assignment Instructions https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/95197/assignments/269723	
	 Final Assignment Instructions revideret https://absalon.instructure.com/courses/95197/assignments/269724	