I. Administrative
   A. Roll
   B. Handouts: discussion summary + group paper exercise
   C. I have responded to all the emails I received
   D. Schedule review
   E. Questions?

II. Discussion of Group Paper Exercise

III. Reading Camus and Nagel

IV. What is Absurdity
   A. What it is not:
      1. The Tense Argument
      2. The Speck Argument
      3. The No Justification Argument
   B. Absurdity writ small:
      1. “In ordinary life a situation is absurd when it includes a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality” (756).
         a. A convicted embezzler being named CFO
b. Looking to a philosopher for fashion advice

2. These situations can be identified and addressed, with the result being elimination of the absurdity.

C. **Absurdity writ large:**

1. *Camus:*
   
a. “… his whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing” (763).
   
b. This needn’t be tragic—only when “conscious” is it tragic.

2. *Nagel*
   
a. The philosophical problem that Nagel, involves *life* in general, and the possibility that it is absurd in a way that cannot be remedied.
   
b. The overwhelming absurdity arises slowly, out of the realization that absurdity can arise in normal situations when a contrast with seriousness obtains, but then can be extended limitlessly. In this way, it is akin to epistemological skepticism.
   
c. There is a presumption that absurdity and meaningfulness are in conflict—is this the case? Can one be a *compatibilist* about these two notions? (Consider: being meaningless according to Taylor does not imply absurdity according to Nagel, and being absurd according to Nagel does not imply meaninglessness.)

V. **Is Human Life Absurd?**

A. *Camus*

1. Yes: “This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth” (763).

2. Absurdity persists, even when accompanied by hope or unaccompanied by consciousness. “The workman of to-day words every day in his life at the same tasks and this fate is no less absurd [than Sisyphus’ fate].” (763).
3. **The relationship of absurdity to happiness**

   a. “Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth” (764).

   b. Absurdity and happiness are what constitute the human condition: “There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night” (764).

B. **Nagel**

1. **An argument for the absurdity of human life**

   P1. We naturally take our daily lives seriously on the whole, perhaps due to their difficulty or the operation within us of desire and other natural yearnings.

   P2. But we also have the self-conscious ability to reflect on our own lives, *sub specie aeternitatis*, as it were.

   P3. When viewed from without, our lives appear small and insignificant, justified only by a framework that is itself arbitrary and dubitable.

   P4. This doubt is ineliminable, since the only resources available to us to eliminate it are the very resources that are in doubt!

C. Given P1-P4, human life is by nature *absurd*, given that it involves a “conspicuous discrepancy” between the pretensions to seriousness of our daily lives and the reality of our contingency and insignificance.

2. Absurdity and skepticism both reveal the limits of humanity—limits of meaningfulness and of knowledge.

3. The absurdity is not really a function of our context or our world, but rather of conflicting aspects of us—our ability to engage subjectively and reflect objectively
VI. What Do We Do about It?

A. Camus

1. React to it with defiance and scorn

2. Be proud and eager: of Sisyphus, Camus says, “His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. … For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days” (764).

B. Nagel

1. Camus’s response is “romantic and slightly self-pitying” (761).

2. Recognition of our essential absurdity is simply just recognition of the human condition.

3. Instead, “If sub specie aeternitatis there is no reason to believe that anything matters, then that does not matter either, and we can approach our absurd lives with irony instead of heroism or despair” (761).