

Introduction to Philosophy

Course Objectives: I have two main hopes for this class. First, I hope we have collective, fruitful, and meaningful engagement with the readings. Reading philosophy can be difficult, so in order to meet this goal we need to develop some skills, especially our critical reading, thinking, and writing skills. Critical reading, thinking, and writing are skills that have wide applicability, so the skills we're developing aren't restricted to academic philosophy. Second, and just as importantly, I hope we gain an understanding of philosophy that is not confined to the activities of professors in philosophy departments. Philosophy can rightly be understood in broad terms, as a process of coming to better understand with one's life and world. I hope that you will leave this course with a deeper and broader acquaintance with the ways in which others have undergone this process, and some intellectual tools that can help you do so for yourself.

Course Description: At its best, philosophy grows out of and bears on social, moral, and existential concerns even where it asks abstract questions in which this bearing is not immediately obvious. I have done my best to select readings that make this clear. Class time will be spent engaging with these readings, first and foremost with an eye towards gaining a basic understanding of what their authors are trying to say. In order to gain a basic understanding of our texts, class time will be focused on collective discussions as much as possible. The success of these discussions will depend on your preparedness. I expect each of you to come to class with some specific questions and concerns that arise as you read. There are no prerequisites for this course, so everyone is perfectly well qualified voice their questions and concerns in class, regardless of whether or not you have any experience reading philosophy.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS & GRADE COMPOSITION:

Participation 10%

Philosophy is best learned through dialogue. This means that participation in class discussion is the best way to get the most out of this class. Be polite. In many ways, disagreement lies at the heart of philosophical discussion. This, however, does not mean that we cannot disagree in ways that embody respect for our interlocutors. Do not cut off others when they are talking, don't dominate conversations, and don't demean the contributions of your peers. Adhering to these guidelines to the best of your ability will result in a good participation grade. I understand that participating in classroom discussion can be difficult for many people. I will do my best to foster your participation, but I, of course, cannot force you to be active in class. If you are especially nervous about engaging in our class discussions, coming to office hours or emailing me to discuss the reading or issues that arise in class can serve as a substitute for speaking in class and ensure that you get a participation grade that reflects your earnest engagement with the material.

Quizzes 10%

Each Friday, I will post a multiple choice quiz on canvas that covers the material from our lectures and discussions that week. The quizzes will be due the following Thursday at 11:59 pm. Because the quizzes focus on material from our time in class, as opposed to our readings, attending class is necessary for doing well on the quizzes. The lowest three quiz grades will be dropped.

Discussion Questions 10%

Once a week, you will be required to submit a discussion question. All questions should be submitted by 11:59 pm the night before we meet for class. These questions can address issues that have come up in discussions or that come up in the readings for that week. All discussion questions will be graded on a pass/fail basis. If you ask a question that is directly relevant to the material from that week, and that was not explicitly answered in class that week, you can expect to receive full credit.

Thesis assignment 10%

For this assignment, you will write an introductory paragraph that ends with a thesis statement that you want to defend in your first paper.

Outline Assignment 10%

For this assignment, you will construct a brief outline of Paper 1. We will talk about the assignment more in class, but it should include two central elements. First, it should include the central subpoints you want to make in your paper. These subpoints are pieces of evidence that provide reasons for believing the claim expressed in your thesis statement. Second, it should include some passages from the text that support your subpoints and/or your main thesis. Put differently, your paper will include some claims about what a particular author thinks, or a point that they make in our readings. The passages should show that they actually think the thing that you attribute to them. Finally, be sure to incorporate the feedback I have provided on your thesis assignment.

Paper 1 15%

This will be a 2-3 page paper based on your outline that defends either the thesis you have already turned in or a modified version of it. Be sure to incorporate and respond to the feedback I have provided both to your outline assignment and your thesis assignment. If your grade on this paper is higher than both your thesis statement and your outline, then this grade will replace both of those grades. In this case, Paper 1 would amount to 35% of your total grade.

Paper 2 35%

This will be a 3-4 page paper that incorporates the skills you have developed throughout working on Paper 1. It must include a clear thesis statement, defend that thesis statement over the course of the paper, and provide cited, textual evidence in favor of the thesis statement.

Schedule of Readings:

Part One: Ancient Greek Philosophy

Week 1

Course Introduction and Syllabus Review

Plato: *Apology* (17a-28b)

Week 2

Plato: *Apology* (28b-42a)

Plato: *Republic* VII (“Allegory of the Cave” excerpt)

Week 3

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* I chapters 1-4

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* VI chapters 5-8

Part Two: Ethics and Epistemology in Modern Philosophy

Week 4

Immanuel Kant: “What is Enlightenment?”

Michel Foucault: “What is Enlightenment?”

Week 5

Immanuel Kant: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Preface)

Immanuel Kant: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Section 1)

Week 6

Rene Descartes: *Meditations* 1-2

Rene Descartes: *Meditations* 2-3

THESIS STATEMENT ASSIGNMENT DUE

Week 7

Rene Descartes: *Meditations* 4-5

Rene Descartes: *Meditations* 5-6

Part Three: Social Epistemology and Social/Political Philosophy

Week 8

Thi C. Nguyen: “Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles”

OUTLINE ASSIGNMENT DUE

Week 9

John Locke: Excerpt from *Second Treatise of Government* (Chapters II and IV)

John Locke: Excerpt from *Second Treatise of Government* (Chapter VIII)

PAPER 1 DUE

Week 10

Charles Mills: Excerpt from *The Racial Contract* (Introduction)

Karl Marx: Excerpt from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844* (“Estranged Labor”)

Week 11

Iris Marion Young: “Five Faces of Oppression”

Kate Mann: *Down Girl* (Ch. 5 “Humanizing Hatred”)

Week 12

Myesha Cherry *The Case for Rage* (Ch I)

Myesha Cherry *The Case for Rage* (Ch IV)

Week 13

George Yancey: “Dear White America”

bell hooks: Excerpt from *All About Love*

Week 14

bell hooks: Excerpt from *Feminist Theory: From Margins to Center?* (“Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression”)

Combahee River Collective Statement

Part Four: Existentialism

Week 15

Søren Kierkegaard: Excerpt from *Fear and Trembling* (“Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?”)

Franz Kafka: Excerpt from *The Trial* (“Before the Law” and Interpretations)

PAPER 2 DUE