

Introduction to Philosophy

PHIL 101 Fall 2010

Department of Classics, Philosophy and Religion. University of Mary Washington
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This course aims to provide students with an understanding and appreciation of the nature of Western philosophy by way of an historical survey of ideas and arguments on certain central questions of metaphysics and epistemology. In doing this, it provides a solid introduction to the intellectual foundations and development of Western civilization. We shall understand "metaphysics" here to refer to the inquiry into the nature of what is, "epistemology" to the inquiry into the nature of knowledge and truth, and "philosophy" generally to both of the following: a) critical reflective inquiry into issues that exceed the grasp of specific sciences, and b) the discourse (or body of discourses) in and through which Western civilization has been thematically working out its understanding of itself since Plato (which includes its understanding of what self, knowledge, existence, value, truth, etc. are).

The issues we will be attending to during the course of the semester include the following: knowledge and opinion, immortality, God, the nature of mind, the dualistic understanding of the self as body and spirit, universal and particular "levels" of reality, common sense, the ideal of presuppositionless knowledge, values and freedom in relation to God, atheism, the meaning of life, responsibility and authenticity, language, truth, history, gender and race.

This course offers an opportunity to read some of the most important authors of the Western intellectual tradition, as well as some more contemporary philosophers, and to think about their significance and worth in a critical way. It hopes to impart an understanding of what philosophy is largely by aiming to cultivate in the student a taste for the somewhat unnatural kind of thinking --reflective, critical and accountable-- that it expresses and calls for.

This course includes philosophical exploration of the concepts of *race* and *gender*, some appreciation of their emergence as philosophically interesting concepts, and some attention to the implications of their absence from the field of interests of traditional philosophy.

As a General Education Course, PHIL 101 satisfies the goal of introducing students to the intellectual foundations and development of Western civilization. In particular the course design reflects the following objectives:

a) to expose students to the original texts of some of the most influential and important thinkers of Western civilization.

b) to impart an appreciation of metaphysical and epistemological questions and their relevance to fields beyond philosophy.

c) to exhibit some of the social, political and moral implications of metaphysics and epistemology.

d) to teach students how to read and analyze philosophical writing.

e) to stimulate students to grapple with philosophical ideas and arguments in dialogue with one another, and appreciate the value of philosophical questioning.

Readings

Required Texts (in bookstore):

Plato, Five Dialogues

Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy

Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion

Mills, The Racial Contract

Other required readings (to be found on internet or Blackboard):

Karl Marx, Manifesto of the Communist Party; *Estranged Labor*

Friedrich Nietzsche, Preface and Part I to Beyond Good and Evil; section #125 of The Gay Science; *Zarathustra's Prologue*, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Simone De Beauvoir, Introduction to The Second Sex

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

Lillian Smith, Killers of the Dream

Sandra Bartky, "Michel Foucault and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power"

Nancy Stepan, "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science"

Recommended: Palmer, Looking at Philosophy

Schedule

Readings are listed for the dates on which they will be discussed.

WEEK 1

24 August. Introduction to the course: the nature of philosophy, some background on Plato and Socrates. Plato's Euthyphro.

26 August. View and discuss video: "The Cave." Apology.

WEEK 2

31 August. Discuss Plato, Phaedo (margin 58-70) (See Phaedo outline on Blackboard.) *How does Socrates' opinion about the unexamined life bear on his view that philosophy is preparation for death?*

2 September. Phaedo 70-85 *Paraphrase the first argument (Opposites) and the second argument (Recollection) as sets of statements*

WEEK 3 **first essay due (Sept 7) Weekly out-of-class team meetings begin**

7 September. Phaedo 85-100; 114c-118. *Paraphrase Simmias' and Cebes' objections. Why is Simmias' objection so quickly retracted?*

Transition to Modern Philosophy: Descartes' *Letter to the Faculty of Sacred Theology at the Sorbonne*. Presentation of the project of The Meditations

9 September. Discuss Descartes, Meditations I, and II *What does Descartes propose that he has learned and shown from his consideration of the piece of wax in II?*

WEEK 4 second essay due

14 September. Meditation III *What does Descartes mean by “idea,” and why is clarity about ideas so important in this Meditation?*

16 September. Wrap up Descartes, Meditations III & VI; Leibniz on pre-established harmony (Blackboard). *What is the problem of the mind and body?*

WEEK 5 third essay due

21 September. Hume, “Of Personal Identity” from A Treatise on Human Nature (Blackboard) and “Of the Immortality of the Soul” (in Dialogues). *What’s the difference between a moral argument for immortality, a metaphysical one, and a physical one? What is an example of each? How does Hume think they fare?*

23 September. Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. Read sections II, V, IX, and X. *Summarize the Argument from Design (in section II) as a numbered series of statements, and spell out one objection from the text. What point in Part X is of greatest significance?*

WEEK 6 fourth essay due

28 September. The significance of Hume's skepticism and its legacy in Kant; introduction of “race.” Look up Kant’s *Copernican Revolution in Philosophy* on the web: see if you can get a handle on it.

30 September. Discuss Hegel and Marx: Philosophy of History, the dialectic, historical materialism. Read: The Communist Manifesto (sections I & II). *Why does Marx say that the bourgeoisie is “a most revolutionary class” (since after all, it is against the bourgeoisie that he seeks a revolution)?*

WEEK 7 fifth essay due

5 October. Discuss Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” “Estranged Labor” in The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. These can be read at the Marx-Engels Archives, or on Blackboard. *What are the four aspects of alienation (estrangement)? Are animals subject to alienation? Why or why not? What is Marx’s opinion of philosophy/philosophers? Why?*

7 October. Midterm Exam

Fall Break Oct 9-12

WEEK 8

14 October. Discuss Nietzsche, “The Madman,” *Preface to Beyond Good and Evil*. (Blackboard). *What is nightmarish about Plato according to Nietzsche?*

WEEK 9 sixth essay due *Art & Philosophy presentation; Science & Philosophy presentation*

19 October. Beyond Good and Evil Part I "On the prejudices of philosophers". *What is Nietzsche's criticism of Descartes? What is his criticism of Locke? Read Zarathustra's Prologue, from Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*

21 October. Discuss Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism.(Blackboard) *In what sense does Sartre endorse despair?*

WEEK 10 **seventh essay due** *Play & Philosophy presentation*

26 October. Beauvoir, "Introduction" to The Second Sex *What is existentialist about de Beauvoir's essay?*

28 October. Finish discussion of existentialist philosophy and de Beauvoir. Aside on Analytic vs Continental Philosophy.

WEEK 11 **eighth essay due** *War & Philosophy presentation; Music & Philosophy presentation*

2 November.

4 November. Discuss Stepan, "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science." *What does Stepan mean when she claims that race and gender became metaphors for one another in 19th century biology? Why doesn't she advocate the elimination of metaphor, and complete consistent literal language for science?*

WEEK 12 *Movies & Philosophy presentation*

9 November. Lecture on Michel Foucault and postmodernism.

11 November. Discuss Bartky, "Michel Foucault and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power." *What idea of Foucault's has Bartky found most useful? Recount an example from your own experience or reflection that helps show its significance.*

WEEK 13 **ninth essay due** *Literature & Philosophy presentation*

16 November. Discuss Smith, Killers of the Dream Forward; Part I chps 1,2; Part II chp 1; Part IV all); and King, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. *What does this set of readings have to do with philosophy?*

18 November. View video lecture by Stephen Jay Gould, "Evolution and Human Equality." Mills, The Racial Contract *Overview* *What is Social Contract theory? What is Mills' fundamental criticism of political philosophy? What light does he shine on the status of Europe (and what is his argument)?*

WEEK 14 **tenth essay due**

23 November. Mills, The Racial Contract *Details* *How does the idea or theory of "the racial contract" help make sense, according to Mills, of the difference between de jure and de facto white supremacy? Discuss the notion of "the savage."*

WEEK 15 *Food & Philosophy presentation.*

30 November. Mills, The Racial Contract “Naturalized” Merits What does Mills mean (and what does his argument seem to be?) in saying that an epistemology of ignorance is built into the racial contract? What is the difference between the use and non-use of quotation marks on the racial contract (which occurs repeatedly throughout the chapter)? See also: Mills’ Dec 2009 *White Ignorance* handout on Blackboard How is Mills proposing a different approach to epistemology from someone like Descartes or Hume?

2 December. Review and discuss the ground covered by the course.

9 December. 3:30-6 PM Final Exam (cumulative)

Policies

No use of laptops or other electronic devices in class; phones, etc., must be turned off.

Your **Grade** is a matter of accumulating points:

20 Ten weekly essays on readings

20 Midterm exam

25 Final exam

10 Quizzes

10 Ten weekly Forum postings (on research topic) and meetings with team

15 Team presentation (beginning in week 7 or 8)

100 total possible

A: 94-100 A-: 90-93 B+ 87-89 B: 84-86 B-: 80-83 C+ : 77-79 C: 74-76 C-: 70-73
D+ 67-69 D: 64-68

Work for the course

Weekly essays are due on Tuesdays, in class, at the beginning of class, printed (stapled if two pages), turned in by you personally; only one will be accepted late (within 24 hours) for half credit. No exceptions. Assignment: *Explain, comment on, summarize some aspect of the in-class work done during the past week; stay focused, write clearly, and convey something of relevance and significance. No quoting of texts or sources.*

Grades on weekly essays stem primarily from turning them in on time, properly completed: a double-spaced, word-processed, *single* page of evidence that you have done the reading, attended class, and thought about the significance of the material. Technical quality and appropriate content are, of course, relevant: grammatical or spelling errors, incomprehensible sentences, blatant irrelevancies, etc. will lower the grade. The value of these assignments is that they motivate reading and reflection; without these there can be little understanding or discussion. Quality of the discussion and evidence of sincere effort are what count here, but you must make any corrections **before** you print it out. Take note that if you miss more than four weekly essays, this lowers your grade in this course by a full

letter. Expect a zero for essays containing more than 3 spelling or grammatical mistakes; learn to proofread.

Quizzes. Expect between five and ten short in-class quizzes on main points in readings or material previously discussed. These will not be announced in advance, and if you are absent, you miss them.

The exams will consist of essays and identifications (and judging true/ false statements). Identifications will include matching an author with a quote, an idea, a text, or an argument. You should build a list of names and terminology as the semester progresses. Essays will call on you to summarize and comment intelligently on key arguments and problems, and to reflect on the significance of the issues studied.

In this course you will be exposed to Philosophy through two approaches: class lectures and discussions, and team meetings. 1. In class we will study and analyze a number of important texts from the Western philosophical tradition, providing an historical overview of the development of Western civilization through the lens of the recorded thinking about the nature of being, life, knowledge, the good, etc. You will learn basic philosophical concepts, study fundamental arguments, learn how to analyze texts, and become familiar with the heritage of your cultural “wisdom.” 2. Outside of class, through your own **research and interactions with a team of classmates**, you will construct an account of the relevance of philosophy to some aspect of “real life,” and prepare a presentation to share this with the rest of us. For this semester, these are the topics the teams will address: *Art, Music, Science, War, Play, Literature, Movies, Food.*

Your team’s task over the course of the semester, week by week, reflecting only to some degree the content we cover in the course, is to address and discuss the question: *what does philosophy have to do with ___ and what does ___ have to do with philosophy?* The answers to this that you develop over the course of the semester will not come simply or directly from the course content itself –they will come from your out-of-class research, looking-around, thinking, reading, talking with people, etc., and from your discussions with your team.

You have to join a group that you can physically meet with for 45 minutes each week, in a classroom that will be reserved for that purpose.

Blackboard discussion forums will provide an archive that all of you add to every week. Every week you’ll meet together to share what you have looked into and hear what others have looked into –and work toward making the most interesting and worthwhile presentation to the whole class that you are able to make. You should expect to spend at least a half hour weekly on this research work (looking at websites, at books or journals in the library, for instance), half an hour posting your results to your Forum, and an hour meeting with your group. Weekly Forum entries will be counted.

After mid-semester, at a rate of one or two per week, team presentations to the whole class will begin.

If you discover that your group has one or more losers in it, i.e., people who won’t pull their own weight, or are not participating in a constructive way, or are interfering with the group’s effort to accomplish its work, then those of you who feel this way need to meet with me in person at least two weeks in advance and sort the situation out. Any individual accused of this will have the opportunity to respond, but may be denied the option of making the presentation, and hence the points. Weekly meeting times, once established, have to be adhered to (each absence will cost 1 point). Also, the group is responsible for (electronically) submitting a very brief report on the meeting.

Submit this to the team’s Forum in Blackboard with the title “Week # __ brief

report,” and cc it to evasey@umw.edu. Minimally this posting will address these points: a) who attended, b) did the group feel the meeting was productive or not productive?, c) questions from the group.

The rest of the students in the class will have a say in determining the grade every group gets; I will take their views into consideration in deciding on the grade. I may ask the presenting team to stay behind for 15 minutes after the class in which they present, so I can discuss the presentation with them and ask questions. The presentations should be 10-15 minutes, and may be supported by a Powerpoint slide show.

Evaluation form

Date: _____ Group presenting: _____

Do you think this group met its assignment of finding some interesting and worthwhile points to make about the relation of philosophy to their topic? If so, jot down a question that it might be possible to include on an exam, that would draw from this presentation. If not, how many points (out of 10) would you recommend they receive for this?

Tutors: Every team will be assigned a tutor (each tutor will actually monitor two teams). Tutors are juniors or seniors who are majoring in Philosophy and attending this class. The tutor’s role is to help you understand the material in the class and appreciate its significance. This means s/he will want to know what aspects of the class discussion and readings you could use some help with. Your time with the tutor should be an opportunity for reviewing key ideas, clarifying points in your class notes, and exploring your own questions. The tutors will keep track of attendance in class and in the team’s scheduled weekly session; s/he will also collect and return weekly essays. The tutor will help you address questions your team identifies, and will make sure they are brought to me for clarification. During the first half of the semester, your weekly sessions will be divided between a) review and discussion with the tutor and b) team discussion of the research topic; **the tutor has no role in the team’s discussions** of the research topic; s/he is a witness or monitor only. Do not ask him/her to direct you, correct you, guide you, or help you with your discussions of the research work.

Even though you will be part of a team assigned a tutor, you also have full access to the professor, and should not hesitate to see me after class, at office hours, or arrange a time that suits you better. The tutors’ role is to assist, not to interfere.

The University of Mary Washington operates at all times under an Honor System. Each student is expected to comply with the spirit of the system, which means (among other things) regular attendance in class, conscientious and timely completion of homework and reading assignments, honesty, and attentiveness to infractions of the Honor Policy.

Evaluation form

Date: _____ Group presenting: _____

Do you think this group met its assignment of finding some interesting and worthwhile points to make about the relation of philosophy to their topic? If so, give them a 10 and jot down a question that it might be possible to include on a quiz or test, that would draw from this presentation. If not, how many points (out of 10) would you recommend they receive for this?

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