**Introduction to Philosophy**

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**Description:**

The main intention of this class is to introduce you to philosophy. What philosophy is can often be quite vague. There is definitely no one agreed upon definition of philosophy, and many philosophers spend a lot of time trying to produce just such a thing. But we won’t worry about that here. For this class, our main goal is to learn to think, write and speak critically through analyzing, critiquing, and producing arguments. We will therefore not try to define philosophy, or attempt to give ourselves a sense that we know what philosophy is. Rather, it is hoped that you will come away from this class with questions and ways of attacking those questions. So this class is, as you can see, not about answers. It’s not about finding the right answer or destroying your classmate’s or textbook’s stupid argument, but rather about digging into the logic of things, understanding the architecture of an argument, imagining ways to rebuild it, and *sometimes* destroying it. But arguments are not like buildings in this way—you can’t just blow them up in one fell swoop. You have to learn how they are built before you can take them down.

Therefore, there will be two general things that we will want to focus on:

1. *Analyzing arguments*. We will do this by reading primary texts from the philosophical tradition. Reading a text in philosophy is not like reading a magazine, a newspaper, a piece of literature, or even a history text. You have to deal with complicated arguments that will not be obvious on a first reading. Therefore we will be reading slowly and talking to one another a lot about what’s going on in the text.
2. *Formulating arguments in our own words*. The papers, as well as the class discussion, will be exercises in applying your abilities to work with arguments. Hence the main focus in them should generally be an explanation of the arguments you are reading (say in Locke or Kant). On top of that, later in the class you will take a swing at taking your own position on one or more of these writers.

More specifically, a number of other goals will be placed before you:

1. A solid understanding of the ideas of major thinkers within the history of philosophy
2. A solid grasp of the major concept and arguments within the history of philosophy
3. Transfer of critical thinking to everyday life and experiences
4. Preparation for critical analysis of high level texts in any subject at the college level

Lastly, you will also walk away for this course with a solid foundation in the history of philosophical ideas and issues. This will help make you a great conversationalist at cocktail and dinner parties.

**Format:**

The class will be a combination of lecture and discussion formats. New ideas will be introduced through lectures and close readings of the texts, and the ideas will be examined and expanded upon in class discussion, including small group, large group, and whole class formats.

**Requirements:**

1. This class will be both lecture and discussion-based, but mostly discussion based. The 30% of your grade for discussion will rest entirely on your level of active participation, which includes listening, speaking, and responding. That is, participation means speaking in class about the texts we are reading, what other people are saying, or saying what you *think* about an issue at hand, but in reference to the text we are reading. Thus if you don’t do the reading, discussion will either be non-existent or devolve into an opinion fest, which is the opposite of philosophy.

2. At some point in the course, we will begin each Friday with two or so students presenting a protocol on the ideas covered during that week. When you sign up for a protocol, the day you sign in for is the day you give your protocol. All of you who sign up for the same day will have to work together and will receive a single grade for the whole thing.

3. We will be experimenting with online discussion groups that will be a part of your discussion grade.

4. Periodically, there will be quizzes on the materials covered. These quizzes will be about basic concepts and ideas from the week.

5. You will have to submit your notes at certain points during the semester—taking notes is required for understanding, reviewing, and writing papers.

6. Your essays are where you will show your understanding of the texts, ideas, and implications of what we have covered. We will discuss them in more detail as the course progresses.

**General Grade Breakdown:**

Discussion/ Participation/Protocols: 30%

Notes: 10%

Papers: 30%

Final: 30%

## Texts and supplemental instructional materials

Primary Text: *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Paperback) Oxford University Press, USA; ISBN-10: 0195169247/ISBN-13: 978-0195169249

Cost: $77.95

Teacher handouts

Films: *The Matrix*, *Waking Life*, *Heathers*, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Others to be determined

**Semester 1: Ancient To Modern Philosophy**

1. Pre-Socratics: Handout from *Presocartic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, Catherine Osborne. Oxford University Press, 2004.
2. Plato & Aristotle: Plato: Sections from *The Republic*, *Apology: Defense of Socrates*; Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* (from reader)

Film: *Trump’s Road to The Whitehouse* & *Groundhog Day*

Assignment: 3 page essay analyzing the main components of either Plato or Aristotle

1. Empiricism: Handouts from Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
2. Rationalism & Skepticism: Readings--René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*; David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (from reader)

Film: *The Matrix*

1. Kant: Reading--handout from *Critique of Pure Reason* (from reader)

Assignment and Final: 5-7 page essay examining Kant’s response to the problem of skepticism

Film: To be determined

**Semester 2: Contemporary Philosophy & Issues in Philosophy**

1. Ethics: Jeremy Bentham, *The Principle of Utility*; Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*; J. L. Mackie, *The Subjectivity of Values*;Review of Aristotelian Ethics (from reader)

Film: *The Dark Knight*

Assignment: individual presentations covering main issues in ethics, a major ethical dilemma, and the best solution for it

1. Existentialism: Readings from Sartre’s *Existentialism is a Humanism* and Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*

Film: *Donnie Darko*

1. Feminism: Handouts from Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex* and Audrey Lorde’s “Age, Race, Class, and Sex”

Film: *Miss Representation*

1. Economic philosophy: Handouts from Karl Marx’s “Wage, Labour, and Capital” and Milton Fridman’s.*Capitalism & Freedom*

Film: *Waking Life*

**Various Stipulations:**

1. No late papers without an excuse. Every day a paper is late, it drops a whole grade. This includes all holidays and weekends.
2. Type all papers. Nothing handwritten will be accepted.
3. Keep a copy of everything you turn in–if I lose it or something happens to it, you may need to resubmit it.
4. All papers must be turned in as a hard copy and submitted to Turnitin.com
5. **Each paper must be titled, stapled, double spaced, contain a bibliography, and have page numbers.**
6. A portion of your grade on your papers falls under rules of general grammatical correctness.
7. You must come to class with your materials, not your phone. Phones will stay in the phone caddy unless we need to use them. Parents need to contact the front office if they need to contact you. Unless the Russians or aliens invade.
8. If you have a problem, know you will be absent in advance, think things are going strangely, etc., please come and talk to me as early as possible.
9. You are responsible for remembering the above stipulations. You are also responsible for reading the stipulations for paper lengths and so on
10. I reserve the right to change these rules at will.

**Expectations & Understandings**

* You are here to understand: if you disagree, argue to understand, not to win or dominate
* You are not here to draw attention to yourself or derail conversations
  + Examples: if you come to class late, sneak in because you’re probably interrupting a discussion. If you have to go to the bathroom, just go and go quietly unless someone is already out. Intentionally stupid responses that are not meant to make philosophical points are not appreciated, but they are remembered during grading. Etc.
* This class is heavy on discussion: you should push yourself to participate if you normally don’t. Start with asking clarifying questions if you’re not sure how.
* If you participate a lot, you should think about whether you are letting others speak.
* If I pass over you in a discussion, it’s almost always because I want to hear from voices that don’t get heard as much
* I give a lot of freedom in this class, but it’s up to you to live up to them.
* It’s up to you to check in with me in advance if you can’t get a paper or assignment done, or if you’re totally lost. I’ll help you find a path out of the problem.
* Dogs are better than cats.