

Skidmore College
Department of Philosophy & Religion
Syllabus

PH 101 Honors
TU-TH 9:10-11:00

Fall, 2009

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is designed to introduce students to the study of philosophy through the reading of texts that have figured prominently in the Western tradition of social/political and ethical philosophy. We are particularly interested in those world-historical reflections on the nature of society and values which give meaning and direction to human existence. Because these have always been based on a conception of human nature, we will pay special attention to the conception of the self upon which societies and values are based. Important themes that will be discussed include freedom and necessity, knowledge, individuality, justice, and the good life.

Each class will begin with two issues presentations. The remainder of the class will, for the most part, be dedicated to discussing the assigned material. I both encourage and expect students to ask questions or pose problems at any time. Therefore, there is no period specifically set aside for discussion.

Required Texts

M. Morgan (ed.), *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*
Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*
Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Week One

9/10 Introduction

Week Two

9/15 Plato, *Euthyphro*, pp. 35-45

What are the primary theses that are proposed? What arguments are given in support of them; what arguments are given against them? Describe the general plot line of the dialogue.

9/17 Plato: *Apology*, pp. 46-55 (30b)

Who are Socrates's accusers and how might one expect that philosophy would lead to the charges made by his "first accusers"? What are the charges made by Meletus and how does Socrates go about rebutting them?

Week Three

9/22: " " pp. 55-63

What are the similarities and differences between philosophy and rhetoric? How does Socrates describe his positive contribution to the community? Why does he claim a

good person can't be harmed? Do you agree? Why? Why not?

- 9/24 Plato, *Republic*, **pp. 182-189** (504 d - 521 b)
What is the analogy between the Sun and the Good? What are the most important features of the Divided Line? What is being symbolically represented in the Allegory of the Cave

Week Four

- 9/29 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I: §§1, 2, 5-7, 9, 13. , **pp. 255-265**
What sort of study is the study of ethics? What sorts of action are there? What sort of action is the action that ethics studies? What is Aristotle's criticism of Plato?
- 10/1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II: 1, 3-6, 8-9 + examples, **pp. 265-273**
What is moral virtue and how does one become morally virtuous? What is meant by the "Golden Mean"? What sort of 'measure' is it?

Week Five

- 10/6 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI: 1-3, VII: 1-8 **pp. 307-308; 315-323** What does knowledge have to do with morality? What is Aristotle's account of the morality of brutishness, anger, self-indulgence?
(First Paper Assigned)
- 10/8 Descartes *Discourse on Method* Parts **One and Two (First Paper Due)**
What is the significance of 'method'? What do you make of the 'architectural' imagery? What are the hallmarks of truth? Describe the steps of his method.

Week Six

- 10/13 Descartes *Discourse on Method*, Parts **Three and Four**
What are the provisional rules he proposes? How does he prove the separation of mind and body? What is his proof for the existence of God? Why is reason supreme?
- 10/15 Descartes *Meditations*, **Letter, Meditations One and Two**
Why is a revolution in thinking necessary? What is dubitable/certain. What is the significance of the 'evil genius'? What is the body? What is the mind? Who am 'I'? What is the significance of the example of wax?

Week Seven

- 10/20 Descartes *Meditation*, **Three**
From where do ideas originate? What is his definition of truth? What is his proof for the existence of God?
- 10/22 Descartes *Meditation*, **Four**
Why is deception a strictly 'human' phenomenon? What are the human faculties that are involved in truth and falsehood? What is the significance of freedom for knowledge?

Week Eight

10/27 Midterm Exam

10/29 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* sec. I-III , **pp.1-15**

What sorts of philosophy are there, and what sort does Hume combat? How and why? What is the 'mental geography' of which Hume speaks? Explain the origin/genesis of ideas.

Week Nine

11/3 Hume, Sec. IV-VI, **pp. 15-36**

What is the status of 'natural law' according to Hume? What is the basis of all knowledge and reasoning? What is the significance of custom/habit? What is the difference between 'fiction' and 'reality'?

11/5 Kant, *Grounding*, **pp. 893-898** (387-97)

Kant distinguishes between pure science on the one hand and, on the other hand, empirical and applied sciences which are based on pure science. He then says he seeks a pure science of morals (viz. a metaphysics of morals). What does his conception of the sciences have to do with his claim that morality is simply a matter of actions in accordance with moral laws? What do "a priori" and "a posteriori" mean? What is "so strange" about the idea of a perfectly good will? What is the *raison d'être* of practical reason?

Week Ten

11/10 " " **pp. 898-903** (397-405)

What are the four examples of duty? How is one to distinguish between them? What are the first and second propositions of morality? What is respect? What is the categorical imperative?

11/12 " " **pp. 903-908** (406-414)

What scepticism toward his view of morality does Kant acknowledge, and what is his response? What is Kant's view of "popular morality"? What is an imperative and what does it presume?

Week Eleven

11/17 " " **pp. 908-914** (415-426)

What does Kant say about rules of skill, counsels of prudence, and commands of morality? What is the proper significance of happiness? What are the differences between the four examples of duties Kant discusses (1013-1015)?

11/19 " " **pp. 914-924** (426-445)

Why should people follow the categorical imperative? What does Kant mean by autonomy and heteronomy? What is a kingdom of ends like? (**Second Paper Assigned**)

Week Twelve

11/24 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 1142-1150 (through section 6)

What does Nietzsche like and dislike about the "English" type of moral genealogy? What is the basis of Nietzsche's evaluation of moral values? Where does Nietzsche find the origin of the concept "good" and how does it relate to the pendant concept of "bad"? (**Second Paper Due**)

Thanksgiving Break

Week Thirteen

12/1: " " pp. 1150-1160 (section 9)

What evidence for his genealogy does Nietzsche draw from etymology? What does Nietzsche find in the "priestly caste" that is positive, negative? What is the nature of resentment and to what has it given rise? Why don't the noble warriors experience resentment? What is the difference between "good vs. bad" and "good vs. evil"? What is culture and what does it do? What gives rise to ideals?

12/3: " " pp. 1160-1169 (section 11)

What is the paradox of responsibility? What is the benefit, the danger of memory? What is the most basic way in which to create and preserve a memory? What is the role of pleasure and pain in the creditor-debtor relationship? What are the drawbacks, the advantages of cruelty? What is justice for Nietzsche, and why is mercy not justice? What is the origin of law, and how does it end up "boomeranging" on its founders?

Week Fourteen

12/10 " " pp. 1169-1179

What is Nietzsche's view of the essence of life and why does the process of interpretation have such importance for him? How does the history of punishment exemplify Nietzsche's view of the essence of life? What is the origin of bad conscience? What is the origin of the state, and how is this related to both artistic personality and cruelty? How is the concept of "god" related to culture, to illness, and why does Nietzsche find Christianity to be an illness whereas the Greek gods were healthy?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) There will be two papers of 4-5 pages in length and mid-term and final examinations.
- 2) Classes will begin with two students being picked for an 'issues presentation.'
- 3) Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Excessive absences will have a depressing effect on one's grade. Plan your departure for Spring Break so that you **DO NOT miss or request the Mid-term or Exam be rescheduled!**
- 4) Come to class **On Time!!**
- 5) Participation in class discussion is required. The quality of one's 'issues presentation' will be

a significant factor in determining the participation grade.

GRADES:

Paper and Exams are worth 20% each

Written Reflections/Class participation: 20%

Generally, grades can be interpreted as follows:

A = consistently outstanding written work that shows the ability to grasp the material, synthesize it, and draw unprompted conclusions and critical inferences; participation in class discussions that evidences that one has "stayed on top" of the reading and has thought critically about it;

B = solid, accurate written work that shows the ability to focus on the most important points of a philosopher's work as well as draw these points together into a unified whole; class participation that evidences an analytical engagement in the material;

C = written work that shows one has read the material and can more or less accurately reiterate it -- ability to make accurate lists of points and issues relevant to the given topic; class participation that evidences one is following the discussion;

D = work that shows one has a limited, random access to course materials -- work plagued by inaccuracies, ambiguities, and a general confusion about what was said and why; minimal class participation (eg. bodily presence).

OFFICE HOURS: T-TH 11:00-1:30; W 12:00-2:00, and by appointment (Ladd 218). Phone: ext. 5406; email address: rlilly