

SYLLABUS
Dept. of Philosophy & Religion
Skidmore College

PH101: Introduction to Philosophy
T-TH 9:10-11:00

Prof. Reg Lilly
Spring, 2013

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, individuality, justice, community, and the good life.

Each class will begin with review and discussion of materials recently covered and questions that have arisen from the day's assignment. The remainder of the class will, for the most part, be dedicated to a lecture/discussion of 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.

LEARNING GOALS

- Think critically, creatively, and independently about philosophy and life
- To learn how to recognize, analyze, construct and criticize arguments.
- Become familiar with and learn to use concepts fundamental to the philosophy
- Read, analyze, and test philosophical texts against your understanding of 'life'
- Communicate effectively

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*

Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Hobbes, *Leviathan* (handout)

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

ASSIGNMENTS

Plato

1/22: Introduction

1/24: Plato: *Apology*,

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? 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? **(Reflection due)**

1/29: Plato, *The Republic*, BK I (327a-340d)

What is the topic of the conversation and how did it arise. Who are the characters present? What definitions of justice are offered by Cephalus and Polemarchus? **(Reflection due)**

1/31: Plato, " " BK II (340e-end)

How does Thrasymachus define justice. How is injustice a virtue? What is meant by natural justice and justice by convention? How does Socrates rebut Thrasymachus? Is Thrasymachus defeated? **(Reflection due)**

2/5: Plato, " " BK II, (357a-368c)

What is the implicit thesis concerning justice and the good life that is being challenged by way of the story of Gyges? In what way is the discussion of reputation a continuation of this story? What is the central question/challenge that Adeimantus makes to Socrates? **(Reflection due)**

2/7: " " BK II (368c-end)

What is the principle governing the founding and development of the city? What necessitates there being guardians? What is the paradoxical nature of the guardians? Why is Socrates concerned with "story tellers"? **(Reflection due)**

2/14 " " BK III (400e-end) **(First Paper Assigned)**

What is/are the principle(s) guiding education? What are the different parts of education? What is the difference between the auxiliaries and the rulers?

2/19 " " BK IV (419a-430d)

What should the concern of the guardians be, according to Socrates; what specific policies does this logically lead to and why? What makes a city moderate and just? **(Reflection due)**

2/19: " " BK IV (430b-end) **(First Paper Due)**

How does Socrates make the transition from a discussion of the city to a discussion of the soul? What is the connection between moderation and justice? What are the parts of the soul and how do they/should they relate to each other?

2/21: " " BK V (449a-464c)

The "first wave" deals with women. What is Socrates's view of women? What is the "second wave" and is it a good idea? What is the significance of Socrates's discussion of pleasure and pain? **(Reflection due)**

- 2/26: " " BK V (464c-end)
What is the "third wave"? What does it mean to be a lover of Forms? To what extent does the third wave answer the challenge presented in Book II in the story of Gyges, etc?
- 2/28: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, **Introduction & Chapters 1-3, 13**
What is the image of human being, of the state, that Hobbes gives us? What is the origin and nature of all the contents of the human mind? What is the difference between imagination, memory, dreams and reason? What are the causes of human conflict? What is the human condition in a state of nature? What natural constraints are there on humans in a state of nature? What is Hobbes's view justice? **(Reflection due)**
- 3/5: " " **Chapters 14-15, 17-18, 20-21**
What is the origin of the state or commonwealth? What powers does the sovereign have and what are Hobbes's views on the various types of political systems? Why does Hobbes see submission, liberty and obligation as necessarily going together?

3/7: **Midterm Exam**

Spring Vacation

Descartes

- 3/19: 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.
- 3/21: *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?
(Reflection due)
- 3/26: 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?
- 3/28: Descartes *Meditation*, **Three & Four**
From where do ideas originate? What is his definition of truth? What is his proof for the existence of God? 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? **(Reflection due)**

Hume

- 4/2: Hume, *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

4/4: Hume, " " Sec. IV-V, **pp. 15-37**
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'? **(Reflection due)**

4/9: Hume, " " Sec VI-VIII (Part I) **pp. 37-64** **Second paper assigned**

Nietzsche

4/11: Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, "Preface," "First Essay" (through section 7)
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"? **(Reflection due)**

4/16: " " **First Essay** (through section 9) **Second Paper Due**
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?

4/18: " " **First Essay** (through 17)
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? **(Reflection due)**

4/23: " " **Second Essay** (through section 5)
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?

4/25: " " **Second Essay** (through section 12)
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? What is Nietzsche's view of the essence of life and why does the process of interpretation have such importance for him? **(Reflection due)**

4/30: " " **Second Essay (to the end)**
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 5 pages in length and mid-term and final examinations.
- 2) There are weekly writing assignments of approximately 150 words. These short "reflections" should be written after having read the assignments and they should present a thoughtful consideration of some issue, question, or problem encountered in the reading. These may be hand-written, typed, or emailed to me, but they are due *at the beginning* of the first class of each week. **NB: These reflections will be required before EVERY class for until February 5.**
- 3) Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Excessive absences will lower your grade. Plan your departure for Spring Break so that you **DO NOT miss the Mid-term Exam. It will not be regiven!**
- 4) Come to class **On Time!!**
- 5) Participation in class discussion is required.

GRADES:

Paper and Exams are worth 20% each

Written Reflections/Class participation: 20%

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 (bodily presence). F = "Wish you had been here!"

OFFICE HOURS:

T/R 12:00-1:00; W 100:00-11:00; and by appointment (Ladd 218). Phone: 5406; email: rlilly