

PH 101H: Introduction to Philosophy: Honors
Skidmore College
Fall 2007
section 001: T/TH, 3:40 - 5:30, Tisch 305

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Course description:

This is an introductory course in which we will discuss some of the major issues in Western philosophy. We will read influential texts from various periods in the history of philosophy and we will explore developments in contemporary philosophy. Topics to be discussed will include the nature of knowledge, the mind-body problem, God, morality, the relationship between the individual and society, and the meaning of life.

This Honors section of Introduction to Philosophy will emphasize the practice of philosophy. Our goal will be to strengthen the skills necessary for reading difficult philosophical texts, debating complex philosophical concepts and arguments, and developing and communicating our own unique philosophical positions. Substantial class time will be set aside for conversation, often based on discussion questions assigned by the instructor, but at least as often based on students' questions and interests. Paper assignments will require not only explanation and synthesis of philosophical ideas, but also original argumentation. Our focus on the history of philosophy will be complemented by more contemporary work (mostly through our reading of Thomas Nagel toward the end of the course, but other contemporary work may be added along the way as well).

Required texts (the reading schedule will be announced on a rolling basis):

- Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, Hackett, 3rd edition
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Hackett, 2nd Edition
- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Hackett, 3rd edition
- Mill, *On Liberty*, Hackett
- Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Citadel
- Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge

Course policies and procedures:

- **Assignments and grading:** Final course grades will be based on the following:
 1. **Two short (four-page) papers:** Topics and due dates will be announced at least one week in advance. Detailed instructions for papers will be provided. **Each short paper will count as 15% of your final course grade.**
 2. **One longer (seven-page) paper:** This paper will be due at some point (to be announced) after our last class. You will choose the topic (which will need to be approved) and develop a philosophical position of your own in relation to our course readings and discussions. Detailed instructions for this paper will be provided. **The longer paper will count as 20% of your final course grade.**
 3. **Two in-class exams:** The first exam will occur roughly halfway through the semester. The date will be announced at least one week in advance. The second exam will take place during our last class session (this is *not* a cumulative final exam). Detailed information about the exam formats

will be announced, but you can expect essay questions. **Each exam will count as 15% of your final course grade.**

4. **Class preparedness and participation:** You should read the assigned texts carefully before the class session during which they will be discussed. Please bring the assigned readings to class. You should be attentive in class and actively participate. Feel free to raise your hand at any time. **Class preparedness and participation will count as 20% of your final course grade.**
- **Late papers and missed exams:** Late papers will be accepted **no later than one class session after the due date**. Five points will be deducted from the grade of a late paper. Make-up exams will be given only in cases of extreme emergency.
 - **Grading system:** Assignments will be given numerical grades based on a maximum of 100 points for each. Final course numerical grades will be computed according to the percentages indicated above. These numerical grades will be converted into final course letter grades according to the following system:

97.5-100	A+
92.5-97.4	A
90.0-92.4	A-
87.5-89.9	B+
82.5-87.4	B
80.0-82.4	B-
77.5-79.9	C+
72.5-77.4	C
70.0-72.4	C-
67.5-69.9	D+
60.0-67.4	D
00.0-59.9	F

- **Attendance:** Regular attendance is essential for success in this course. Reading the assigned texts is important, but the central concepts, arguments, and theories from the readings will be clarified in lecture and discussion. Class participation and unannounced quizzes also make up a significant part of the course grade. Therefore you should make the effort to attend every class session. When absence is absolutely necessary, you should get the notes you missed from another student in the class. After reviewing those notes, contact me with any questions you have.

Please arrive on time for class. I will take attendance at the beginning of each session. Each student will be allowed **two opportunities to have his/her name removed from the absence list after class if he/she was late**. It is the student's responsibility to request removal of his/her name from the list immediately after the class for which he/she was late. Each late arrival after the third will be counted as an absence.

Each student will be allowed **three absences** without direct penalty. For each absence beyond the third, three points will be deducted from the student's final course numerical average. Excessive

absences will also adversely affect class participation grades. Any student who misses more than a third of the class sessions will receive an F for the course.

- **Paper submissions:** Papers must be submitted in hard copy only. No electronic submissions please.
- **Extra credit:** There will be no extra credit.
- **Academic integrity:** All students will be held to the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. I recommend that you consult the college's statements on academic integrity, plagiarism, cheating, the honor code, etc. in the Academic Information Guide available at <http://www.skidmore.edu/administration/dean-studies/AcademicIntegrity.htm>. If any of this is unclear, speak with me and I will answer your questions. We will discuss plagiarism and how to avoid it when the first paper is assigned. Before handing in papers, I highly recommend that you consult Skidmore's Academic Integrity Checklist available at <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/writingbrd/aic.htm>
- **Mutual respect:** I would like to encourage and maintain a friendly and comfortable class atmosphere. This requires, at a minimum, that we all show the proper respect for each other. Racist, sexist, and otherwise offensive language and behavior will not be tolerated.
- **WebCT page:** There is a WebCT page for this course. The WebCT entry page can be found at <http://webct.skidmore.edu/webct/public/home.pl>. The syllabus, assignments, and other important course documents, announcements, and information will be posted on WebCT. Each student should familiarize him/herself with the use of WebCT during the first week of the course.
- **Accommodations:** If you are a student with a disability, please bring me your semester memo of accommodations as soon as you obtain it. If you think that you need accommodations but do not yet have them, set up a meeting with the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in the Office of Student Academic Services, in Starbuck Center.
- **Meeting with your instructor:** Please meet with me whenever you have any questions, comments, problems, or worries. I have scheduled office hours and I will also be able to make appointments for other times. Email is also a good way to get in touch with me.