

Introduction to Philosophy

Ph 101 (004) Tu/Th 11.10-12.30 Emerson Room

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Office hours Tues 1-3 [and by appointment]
 Wed 11-1

General policies

Attendance

Prompt attendance at all class meetings is required. You will be allowed two unexcused absences, but for each additional absence your final grade for the course may fall as much as one notch (e.g., from a B to a B-minus). Arriving late twice counts as an unexcused absence.

Participation

Please come to class prepared to participate. Do the assigned reading before class and bring it with you. Be prepared to ask and answer questions about the reading and about the material covered in the previous class. You will be called upon regularly to ask and answer questions, so if you are not well prepared for class it will soon be obvious to everyone. Occasionally, short quizzes will also be given at the beginning of class. Good participation may raise your final grade as much as one notch (e.g., from a B to a B-plus); poor participation may lower it one notch.

Assignments

All written work must be handed in on time. To hand in an assignment on time, you must bring a hard copy with you at the beginning of class on the day that it is due. Grades on late assignments will drop one notch for each day late. Plagiarism will be punished severely.

Required textbooks

Plato, *Protagoras* and *Meno*, translated by Robert C. Bartlett (Cornell University, 2004)

Readings for Introduction to Philosophy (Course Packet)

Requirements

Three one-page reflection papers on our video selections	5 + 5 + 5 =	15
Two papers, approximately five pages each	20 + 20 =	40
Midterm exam		20
Final exam		25

Course description

This course is designed to introduce you to what philosophy is and what it can do. Our strategy is to pursue one basic theme, beginning with the work of Plato in Ancient Greece and proceeding through to the present day. Our theme is the origin, nature and purpose of being human.

Regarding human origins, we will examine four main sources:

1. The myth told by Protagoras in Plato's dialogue
2. The story in the Book of Genesis, shared by Christians and Jews, but interpreted in a variety of ways
3. *2001: A Space Odyssey*: a science-fiction account of the evolution of human beings
4. Darwin's theory of evolution

The myth that Protagoras tells involves the Greek gods, for example, Zeus.

The story told in the Book of Genesis can be viewed by others as a myth, but Christians and Jews regard it as revelation—as a message revealed by God to human beings through the medium of a prophet.

2001 involves some mysterious intervention from an extraterrestrial (if not supernatural) source; it alludes to some popular religious images; it also refers to the current scientific understanding of human evolution.

We confront three different kinds of sources: myth, religion and modern science. Philosophy can be understood as the universal discipline—an intellectual territory where we attempt to understand the relationships (and the conflicts) between other, competing claims on human life, loyalty and attention.

With any picture of human origins, there comes a conception of human nature (what it means to be a human being and not some other kind of being) and a conception of how human beings do or should behave. In philosophy, conceptions of how human beings do or should behave fall under the heading of ethics and politics. Here we can address more concrete questions, such as: What (if any) is the difference between good violence (e.g., the heroic deeds of a soldier in war) and bad violence (e.g., murder)?

Thus we are raising and pursuing two basic questions:

- I. What does it mean to be human?
- II. How should human beings (e.g., you and I) relate to each other and how should we relate to other kinds of beings?

The more basic question, however, is this:

Who is best qualified to answer these questions:

Religious authorities? Biologists? Politicians? Fiction writers? Philosophers?

Every man and woman for him or herself?

Schedule

Week 1	Jan 20-22 Movie: <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> The Bible: Genesis	
2	Jan 27-29 Plato, <i>Protagoras</i>	Reflection 1 due on Tuesday Jan 27
3	Feb 3-5	
4	Feb 10-12 Movie: <i>Battlestar Galactica: Scar</i>	
5	Feb 17-19 St Thomas Aquinas, <i>On law</i> The Bible: Letters of St Paul	Reflection 2 due on Tuesday Feb 17
6	Feb 24-26 Maimonides, <i>Guide for the Perplexed</i> The Bible: Exodus	Paper 1 due on Thurs Feb 26
7	Mar 3-5	Midterm Exam Thurs Mar 5
8	Mar 17-19 Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>	
9	Mar 24-26 'How do humans fit into evolution?' 'Can evolution account for ethics?' by Ernst Mayr in <i>This Is Biology</i> Movie: <i>Planet Earth</i> : Battle between chimpanzees	
10	Mar 31-Apr 2 'Creationism' by Elliott Sober in <i>Philosophy of Biology</i> On the Scopes Trial by Karen Armstrong in <i>The Battle for God</i>	Reflection 3 due on Tues Mar 31
11	Apr 7-9 'Non-overlapping magisteria' by Stephen Jay Gould 'Why should we be concerned?' by John Houghton in <i>Global Warming</i>	
12	Apr 14-16 Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spake Zarathustra</i> , Part One (available on-line)	Paper 2 due on Thurs Apr 16
13	Apr 21-23	
14	April 28	Last Day Take-home Final Exam TBA