

Philosophy 101

Introduction to Philosophy

Skidmore College
Spring Semester, 2009
Ladd 307
Tues/Thurs 2:10-3:30

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Fri 9:15-10:15 AM

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are needed to see this picture.

Course Theme: *Soul and Society*

Course Description

Philosophers have historically agreed that there needs to be a complimentary relationship between the nature of the individual and the nature of the state. For instance, one 17th century British philosopher argued that, because people are at base self-interested and prone to violence, the fundamental function of government is to stop the strong from preying on the weak. But who is to say that human beings are essentially malevolent? Might it not be the case that human beings are essentially good and that it is actually their government or other social institutions that make them do evil things? In this case, it would be society, not the soul of human beings that is evil and in need of correction. In an attempt to come to a better understanding of ourselves and of our relationship to society, it is questions like these that we will raise in this course. It is hoped that by reading and responding to classic texts written by philosophers who have thought deeply about these matters, we will be aided in this task by their efforts. Further, because the answers to such questions necessarily depend on metaphysical, ethical, political, aesthetic and logical considerations, it is expected that exploring these issues will also serve as a broad introduction to the practice of philosophy.

Course Goals

In addition to gaining a better understanding of the relationship between our selves, other people and the institutions that surround us, it is hoped that each of you will come away from the class comfortable with philosophic texts and able to formulate and answer philosophical questions on your own. These skills should serve you well at the coffee shop, during existential crises and on extended road trips. However, as they include learning how to read texts critically and to form coherent arguments, they should also translate nicely to any endeavor--including your other coursework--that demands you synthesize complex ideas, form an opinion and then communicate it to others.

Evaluation and Grading

a. reading and discussion questions: 12% of class grade

About once a week (and maybe more) I will assign a question that (a) has to do with the next reading, or (b) that is designed to spur discussion in a subsequent class, or (c) that starts you working on a philosophical or scholarly skill. On questions of the first two types, please take the time to write a paragraph or so in response and have it ready to turn in at the beginning of the next class. Those answers that demonstrate thought and engagement with the text through citation, exegesis, critical thought, and/or relation of the reading to other texts, experiences, or events will receive full credit and either a "√" or a "+." Question responses that fail to be turned in or that evidence little effort or thought will receive no credit and a "-." Like the gold star in elementary school, the "+" is its own reward and indicates how well you are engaging with the class materials. The mark also remains in my grade book and, come December, will remind me of your excellence.

b. class participation: 12% of class grade

Philosophy and philosophical texts are very difficult and often hard to understand on our own. Because of this and because this class includes discussion and discussions need participants, attendance is mandatory and you are expected to take part in all class discussions. This aspect of your performance will be reflected in a small portion of your grade that in no way reflects its overall importance to the class. However, it should also be easy given that this participation is basic to the class and demands no more of you than showing up ready to express an informed opinion after having read the texts or thought about the discussion questions assigned for the day. This grade is based upon the quality (not necessarily quantity) of your participation. However, it is impossible to participate well if you don't show up to class or if you seldom engage in discussions and ask questions.

c. 2 exams: 36% of class grade

There will be two short answer exams, spaced over the course of the semester. These will be both technical (having to do with facts and specific arguments) and evaluative.

d. 2 short papers: 40% of class grade

There will be two papers written for the class. One will be on Aristotle, the other will be comparative. We will spend time in class discussing what constitutes a philosophic argument and how to write a philosophy paper. You will have the opportunity to present me with ideas and drafts before each paper is due to make sure that you are executing the best essay possible.

Policies

No late assignments will be accepted without express permission of the instructor obtained at least 24 hours before the assignment's due date. Violations of the Skidmore College Honor Code will result in an "F" for a class grade as well as all penalties imposed by the College Integrity Board.

Note:

I encourage you to see me if, at any time, you are having problems with the readings, with understanding the class discussions or if you just wish to talk more about issues raised in the class. I am willing to spend time with you in person to help you get as much out of the course as you wish.

Required Texts

- Aristotle *Selected Works*
- John Stuart Mill *Utilitarianism*
- Course Packet [CP]

Schedule (note: schedule is subject to change based on class needs and interests)

Week 1, January 18-24

Tuesday Introduction

Thursday Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, "Letter III" [CP]
How to read Aristotle. Bring your book!

Week 2, January 25-31

Tuesday Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapters 1-4 (chapter 4 read only 1096a12-23)
•••citation exercise•••

Thursday Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapters 5-13
•••citation exercise due•••

Week 3, February 1-7

Tuesday Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapters 1-6

Thursday Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapters 7-9

Week 4, February 8-14

Tuesday Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13

Thursday Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, Chapters 6-10

Week 5, February 15-21

Tuesday Aristotle, *Politics* (selections, hand-out)

Thursday "Honor, Virtue and the Skidmore Community" debate & discussion.

Week 6, February 22-28

Tuesday Review Day
•••1st Paper Assigned•••

Thursday Exam #1

Week 7, March 1-7

Tuesday How To Write A Philosophy Paper

Thursday Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" [CP]

Week 8, March 8-14

Tuesday Spring Break

Thursday Spring Break

Week 9, March 15-21

Tuesday Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" [CP]

Thursday Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" [CP]
•first paper due at beginning of class•

Week 10, March 22-28

Tuesday Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" [CP]

Thursday Screening: Werner Herzog, *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*

Week 11, March 29- April 4

Tuesday Rousseau and Herzog debate and discussion

Thursday **EXAM #2**

Week 12, April 5-11

Tuesday John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, selections

Thursday John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, selections

Week 13, April 12-18

Tuesday Harriet McBryde Johnson, "Unspeakable Conversations" [CP]
Formal Discussion: "Utilitarianism and Disability"

Thursday John Dewey, "Individualism Old and New," [CP]

Week 14, April 19-25

Tuesday John Dewey "Search for the Great Community" [CP]

Thursday John Dewey "Search for the Great Community" [CP]
••2nd Paper Assigned••

Week 15, April 26-May 2

Tuesday Final class discussion: The Value of Philosophy

Week 16, May 4-10

••2nd Paper Due, date TBA••