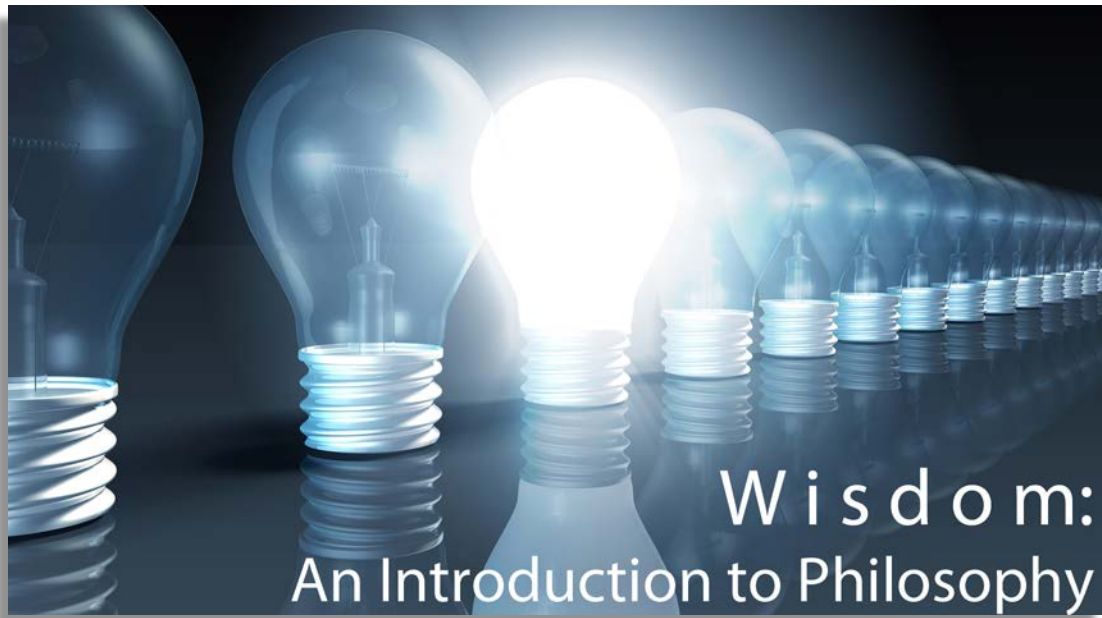




Introduction to Philosophy (course #PH-101-002; Fall 2012)

"Wisdom is the science of happiness and must be studied above all other things."

– G.W. Leibniz, 1694

"... 'cause it's a long road to wisdom, but it's a short one to being ignored."

– The Lumineers, 2012

This course will provide a whirlwind tour of the wisdom of Western philosophy. There are two primary strands we will follow:

- 1) Who are we, as persons, and what is our place in the grand scheme of things?
- 2) What is the best way to live our lives, in light of the first question?

The three main areas of philosophy that we will focus on are called **metaphysics**, **philosophy of religion**, and **ethics**. We will read classical texts from ancient Greek philosophy right through to writings from philosophers of today. We will read *actively*, always attempting to discover something about ourselves through the writings of others.

Course Texts

The following text is required for this course and is available through the Skidmore Shop.

Since Socrates: A Concise Sourcebook of Classic Readings, Robert C. Solomon and Clancy Martin, eds. (Thomson Wadsworth, ISBN: 978-0534633288)

Instructor Information

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Office Hours: MW 1:00-2:00 PM

Course Objectives and Grading Policies

The main objective of this class is for you to get a taste of what it is to do philosophy (as opposed to merely learning about philosophers). *Doing* philosophy involves a lot of reading and writing, but not the sort of reading and writing you will likely have done, say, in your literature class. Reading philosophy involves careful attention to detail, and it will require you to slow down and concentrate on the specific claims that are being made in the text. With that in mind, we will work together on developing the skills of reading, writing, and discussing philosophical texts.

Specifically, by the end of this class, you will be able to

1. **Read philosophical texts.**
 - a. Identify arguments in a philosophical text, isolating the claim being defended and the reasons given in support of that claim.
 - b. Recognize differences in the sorts of arguments being made, distinguishing deductive & inductive, valid & invalid, and strong & weak arguments.
 - c. Form preliminary evaluations of arguments.
2. **Write philosophical essays.**
 - a. Paraphrase and reconstruct a philosopher's argument in your own words, following principles of interpretive charity.
 - b. Formulate a focused, clear, and substantive thesis sentence, with a scope suitable for a relatively short philosophical essay.
 - c. Provide a clear argument in support of your thesis.
 - d. Assess and respond to key objections to your thesis.
3. **Engage in philosophical discussion.**
 - a. Present your own philosophical views and interpretations orally and articulate your reasons for thinking those views are true.
 - b. Respond orally to objections and questions that others raise for your views.
 - c. Raise questions for others, demonstrating a sense for how your classmates can build on or develop their views further and for where problems lie for their argument.

Your grade in this class will be a function of how well you accomplish these three objectives, which I will evaluate in the following ways:

- A. **Attendance and Participation**

Obviously, you cannot engage in a philosophical discussion if you're not here. And when you are here, I want you to be *fully* here—this class works best if everyone in the room is invested in learning from each other. So, attendance and participation is a minimum expectation of the class.
- B. **Regular Assignments, Quizzes, and Discussion (20%)**

I will ask each of you to lead short discussions to get each of us in the class to go deeper in our thinking of the topics at hand. Some discussions will be in smaller groups—more details are given below, and I will provide further information in class. These discussions support the third objective above.

On days that have no discussion assigned, there will usually be a reading quiz. Additional in-class exercises will be assigned throughout the semester.

B. Exams (15% each; total=30%)

The exams will ask you to identify, compare, and synthesize material we are studying, allowing me to see how well you are achieving the first objective. This is the primary way I will be able to see the *breadth* of your learning this semester.

C. Three Papers (15% each for the first two; 20% for the third; total=50%)

You will write three papers of 5-7 pages each. Your papers are (obviously) the way to achieve the second goal. I will incorporate in-class writing activities to help you learn how to write a strong philosophical essay. Specific instructions for each of the papers will be given as the due dates approach.

Things that must be said.

1. Late assignments will not be accepted without approval *prior* to the deadline.
2. You must hand in all 3 papers in order to pass the class.
3. Any violation of academic integrity (plagiarism, cheating, and the like) will result in failure of the class. The offense will be reported to the Office of Academic Advising, which may result in further consequences.
4. Missing more than 5 classes (whether or not excused) will result in failure of the course.

Attendance and Participation

Since the arguments we will be reading are provocative and difficult, it is essential that you come to class prepared to discuss them. So, attendance and participation is required—as noted above, there will be grade penalties for excessive absences.

Participation should not be understood in terms of simply promoting your own views—if that's all you did, you would not be a good participant. Good participation means that you are actively engaged during the class time in trying to understand clearly the arguments being presented. So, even if you don't yet have a view of your own on the issue under discussion, good participation will include asking clarifying questions (of me and of your classmates), raising possible counterexamples, proposing alternative ways of understanding an argument, uncovering underlying assumptions, and any other way of honestly and respectfully engaging with the issues being discussed.

Exams

There will be a midterm exam and a final exam in this course. The exams will draw from material in the readings or from class discussions. You will need to take good notes in class and keep complete notes on your reading so that you can prepare for the exams.

The final exam *will* be cumulative, and so it would be worth your time to go over the midterm exam, figuring out what you missed and why. I will give you more information about the format of the exams later in the semester.

Note: The final exam is scheduled for **Dec. 19, 9:00 a.m.-12:00p.m.** This schedule is set by the Registrar's Office—I have *no* influence over the schedule. I will expect everyone to come at the arranged time. The only allowable exceptions are (a) conflict with another exam; or (b) serious illness or injury.

Discussion Groups

At the beginning of the semester, I will assign discussion groups. Each group will be responsible for discussion twice over the course of the semester.

Procedure: Here's an example of how it will work. Suppose Group 1 is responsible for leading a discussion of Plato's *Republic*. The members of that group will have to develop an understanding of the text and be prepared to lead his or her classmates to a deeper engagement with the text. *I strongly recommend* meeting together in advance to ensure a solid understanding of the text and to brainstorm some ideas on how to lead the discussions.

The discussions should focus on three things:

- (a) identify 2-3 key passages in the text that express the main point of the reading;
- (b) translate these key passages into the group's own language, ensuring that everyone understands what is being said in the text itself; and
- (c) evaluate and discuss the significance of the reading, focusing on one or more of the following:
 - analyzing a central argument from the reading,
 - synthesizing the readings with other things we've read or discussed,
 - evaluating the views expressed in the readings,
 - presenting counterexamples or potential problem cases for the author,
 - considering significant positive or negative implications of the main argument, or
 - applying the view to real-world examples.

Once in class, each member of Group 1 will lead a different group of students in a discussion of the text. So, Student A will lead a discussion with Group 2, Student B with Group 3, etc. And so each student in Group 1 must have a clear handle on the text prior to the class, since the group will be dispersed during the class time.

Evaluation: The students who are being led in discussion will write an evaluation of the discussion leader. The evaluation form will ask how much of the readings were completed for that day, and the response will affect how the evaluation of the leader is weighted. (Since I shouldn't reduce your classmate's grade for your own lack of preparation.) The peer evaluations are designed to be *formative* and *constructive* rather than a performance evaluation. The students being led in discussion will receive a daily participation grade for participation in the discussion and writing the evaluation.

The leaders will also complete an evaluation, focusing on their own preparation and perceptions of the success of the discussion. The combination of self-evaluation and peer evaluations will result in a grade for leading the discussion.

Honor Code

In keeping with the Honor Code, I must give you some sense of what constitutes “honesty and integrity” in your work for this class. The main things I would be concerned about in this class are:

- a. **Papers:** any sources that you use in your paper must be properly quoted and cited. I don’t expect you to do any outside research for the papers in this class. But if you do happen to consult other sources (whether formal research materials in the library or less formal research materials such as online write-ups), you must identify the source. If there is any uncertainty about what constitutes plagiarism or unauthorized aid on the papers, you should discuss it with me.

Of course, you are free to make use of peer reviews, visits to the Writing Center, meetings with me, etc., to sharpen your paper. In fact, **I encourage wide use of such aids.**

- b. **Exams:** you may study together (again, I encourage it!), but you may not make use of any notes or help from others (in any form) during the exams.

If you are in doubt about whether anything else constitutes a violation of the honor code, it is your responsibility to consult with me first. Any violation of the honor code will result in failure of the class.

Disability Notice

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities. You will also need to provide documentation that verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150, or stop by the office of Student Academic Services. (Website: http://cms.skidmore.edu/academic_services/.)

Tentative Schedule

Note: The readings and schedule may change through the course of the semester. I will announce any changes in class.

1. 9/5	Introduction to the Course
2. 9/10	Syllabus and Bertrand Russell: "Appearance and Reality" (592-598)
3. 9/12	Pre-Socratics: Thales, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and Parmenides (18-26)
4. 9/17	Please re-read the <i>syllabus</i> in its entirety and remind yourself of the deadlines and grading policies for this course Plato: Apology (27-46): Discussion led by group 1
5. 9/19	Plato: Euthyphro (47-64)
6. 9/24	Plato: Republic: Book I (119-150): Discussion led by group 2 9/28 – Paper One due (submit via Blackboard by midnight).
7. 10/1	Plato: Republic: Books V and VII (151-163): Discussion led by group 3
8. 10/3	Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, Book I (164-180)
9. 10/8	Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, Book II (181-190): Discussion led by group 4
10. 10/10	Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, Books III & X (190-206): Discussion led by group 5
11. 10/15	Aristotle: Categories and Metaphysics (206-215)
12. 10/17	Thomas Aquinas: "The Five Ways" (254-261): Discussion led by group 6
13. 10/22	Writing Workshop and Review
14. 10/24	Midterm Exam
15. 10/29	René Descartes: Meditations I-III (282-304)
16. 10/31	René Descartes: Meditations IV & VI (304-320): Discussion led by group 1 11/2 – Paper Two due (submit via Blackboard by midnight).
17. 11/5	John Locke: Essay, Book II, ch. I-IV (321-334)
18. 11/7	John Locke and David Hume: Personal Identity (Locke 342-345, 375-376, & 401-403): Discussion led by group 2
19. 11/12	David Hume: Treatise, Book III, Of Morals (408-420): Discussion led by group 3
20. 11/14	Immanuel Kant: Groundwork, Preface & First Section (421-422 & 463-473)
21. 11/19	Immanuel Kant: Groundwork, Second and Third Section (473-499): Discussion led by group 4 11/21-23 – Thanksgiving Break
22. 11/26	Søren Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript (527-533): Discussion led by group 5
23. 11/28	John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism, ch. 1-2 (534-550)
24. 12/3	John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism, ch. 3-4 (550-559): Discussion led by group 6
25. 12/5	Thomas Nagel: "What's it Like to Be a Bat?" (Blackboard) 12/7 – Paper Three due (submit via Blackboard by midnight).
26. 12/10	Susan Wolf: "The Meanings of Lives" (Blackboard)
27. 12/12	TBD

Week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Sept. 2				1 – Sept. 5 Classes Begin			
2 Sept. 9		2 – Sept. 10		3 – Sept. 12			
3 Sept. 16		4 – Sept. 17		5 – Sept. 19			
4 Sept. 23		6 – Sept. 24		Sept. 26 No Classes (Yom Kippur)		Sept. 28 Paper 1 Due	
5 Sept. 30		7 – Oct. 1		8 – Oct. 3			
6 Oct. 7		9 – Oct. 8		10 – Oct. 10			
7 Oct. 14		11 – Oct. 15		12 – Oct. 17			
8 Oct. 21		13 – Oct. 22		14 – Oct. 24 Midterm Exam		Oct. 26 No Classes (Study Day)	
9 Oct. 28		15 – Oct. 29		16 – Oct. 31		Nov. 2 Paper 2 Due	
10 Nov. 4		17 – Nov. 5		18 – Nov. 7			
11 Nov. 11		19 – Nov. 12		20 – Nov. 14			
12 Nov. 18		21 – Nov. 19		Thanksgiving Vacation			
13 Nov. 25		22 – Nov. 26		23 – Nov. 28			
14 Dec. 2		24 – Dec. 3		25 – Dec. 5		Dec. 7 Paper 3 Due	
15 Dec. 9		26 – Dec. 10		27 – Dec. 12 Last Day of Classes			
				Dec. 19 Final Exam 9am-12pm			