

Skidmore College
Department of Philosophy & Religion

PH 103:Introduction to Philosophy
TH/TH 11:10-12:30

Spring, 2016
Reg Lilly

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.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

ed. Reeve, *A Plato Reader*

Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy and Discourse on Thinking

Hume, Enquiry into Human Understanding

Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

January

Week 1

26 Introduction

28 **Heidegger**, *Discourse on Thinking* (handout)

February

Week 2

2 **Plato**, *Euthyphro*, Reeve, 3-17

What are the primary theses that are proposed? What arguments are given in support of them; what arguments are given against them? Describe the general plot line of the dialogue.

4 **Plato**, *Apology*, (17a-30b)

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?

Week 3

9 **Plato**, *Apology*, (30b-42a)

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?

11 **Plato**, *Republic*, BK I (327a-340c) (**First paper assigned**)

Week 4

16 **Plato**, *Republic*, BK I, (340c-354c)

18 **Plato**, *Republic*, BK II (357a-374a) (**First paper due**)

Week 5

23 **Plato**, *Republic*, BK II (374a-383c)

25 **Plato**, *Republic*, BK III (400e-417b) [NB skip first half BK III]

March

Week 6

1 **Plato**, *Republic* BK IV (419b-430d)

3 **Plato**, *Republic* BK IV (430d-445e)

Week 7

8 **Mid-term Exam**

10 **Descartes** *Discourse on Method*, Parts One and Two

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.

Spring Break

Week 8

22 **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?

24 **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?

Week 9

31 **Descartes** *Meditation*, Three

From where do ideas originate? What is his definition of truth? What is his proof for the existence of God?

April

5 **Descartes** *Meditation*, Four

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?

Week 10

7 **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.

12 **Hume, §§4-5 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'?

Week 11

14 **Hume, pp. 37-68 (Second paper assigned)**

19 **Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 1-12 (through section 4)**

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"?

Week 12

21 **Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 18-33 (through section 9)** 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 *ressentiment* and to what has it given rise? Why don't the noble warriors experience *ressentiment*? 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? **(Second paper due)**

26 **Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 35-41 (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?

Week 13

28 **Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 41-52 (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?

May

3 **Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 52-66**

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 4-5 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 11.**
- 3) Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Excessive absences will have a depressing effect on one's grade. Plan your departure for Spring Break so that you **DO NOT miss or request the Mid-term Exam be rescheduled!**
- 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%

Generally, 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: MW 2:00-3:00; TUTH 3:30-4:30 and by appointment (Ladd 204C). Phone: ext. 5406; email address: rlilly