“How Should We Act, How Do We Know?”

Course Description and Goals
This course provides an intensive introduction to the practice of philosophy. I say practice here rather than “discipline” or “subject” because, even though you will come away from the course with an understanding of what philosophy is and what kind of things it studies, what I most hope you will take away from the course is an approach to asking questions and of finding answers to them that is unique to philosophy. To introduce this practice, we will look at two perennial problems for philosophy, those of “How Should We Act?” and of “How Do We Know?”

To animate and give substance to this practice, we will read and discuss classical and contemporary attempts to answer these questions offered by philosophers who have thought deeply about such matters.

Course Learning Goals
By the end of this class, students who work diligently, who participate, and who take chances will be able to recognize and to formulate philosophical questions. In addition, you will learn how to work with philosophical texts and to critically examine philosophical arguments. Students will likewise engage in critical philosophical dialogue with their peers while learning how to collaboratively approach philosophical problems. These abilities should translate to other academic disciplines and to other areas of your life where recognizing philosophical issues and being able to work them out may be important. In addition to these skills, participants will acquire knowledge about what philosophy is in general and will recognize its major sub-disciplines. Students should likewise gain a sense of the history of the philosophical tradition and achieve knowledge of selected contemporary approaches to philosophical questions.

1 *Allison Jaggar, William James, Ursula K. LeGuin, Elizabeth Anderson, Baruch Spinoza*
Evaluation and Grading

**reading, discussion, and skill building questions:** 15%

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 philosophic 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 "√+." Responses 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 May, will remind me of your excellence. Bonus credit responses will be accepted which clearly and meaningfully link course materials to the Spinoza lecture series or to other academic lectures.

**class participation and attendance** 15%

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 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 very hard to participate well if you don't show up to class and if you seldom speak. You will be asked to assess your own class participation and attendance at the end of the semester. This assessment will then be compared against my own records and impressions in order to determine a final grade.

**3 papers**

There will be 3 papers written for the class. One will be on Aristotle; one comparing Aristotle to two other value theories; and the third will deal with theories of knowledge. We will spend time in class discussing what constitutes a philosophic contribution and how to write a philosophy paper. Learning to incorporate difficult original texts into your papers and to make philosophical arguments is learned through trial and revision. Because of this you will have the opportunity to meet with me before each paper is due to make sure that you are executing the best paper possible.

**Assignment 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 Honor Council.
Materials

Required Media
  • Course Packet
  • Notebook with folder for handouts

Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from the Skidmore 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 in Starbuck Center.

Title IX

Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

More information can be found at https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/ or by contacting the Title IX Deputy Coordinator.
## Schedule

### Week 1  January 22-28

**Wednesday**
- Syllabus review and Course Introduction

**Friday**
- Introduction (continued)
- How to read Aristotle (bring your CP)
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book I; chapter 1

### Week 2  January 29-February 4

**Wednesday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book I; chapters 1-4 (chapter 4 read only 1096a12-23)
- Citation Exercise

**Friday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book I; chapters 5-13

### Week 3  February 5-11

**Wednesday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book II; chapters 1-6

**Friday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book II; chapters 7-9

### Week 4  February 12-18

**Wednesday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book VI; chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13

**Friday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book X; chapters 6-10

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**How Should We Act? Three Philosophical Responses**

### Week 2  January 29-February 4

**Wednesday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book I; chapters 1-4 (chapter 4 read only 1096a12-23)
- Citation Exercise

**Friday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book I; chapters 5-13

### Week 3  February 5-11

**Wednesday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book II; chapters 1-6

**Friday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book II; chapters 7-9

### Week 4  February 12-18

**Wednesday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book VI; chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13

**Friday**
- Readings
  - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BCE)
    - Book X; chapters 6-10
Politics, Book I, Chapter 1

Week 5  February 19-25

Wednesday
- Aristotle Discussion
- How to Write a Philosophy Paper
- Paper #1 Assigned

Friday
- Readings
  - Divine Command Theory Hand-out [CP]
- Screening
  - Krzysztof Kieslowski, Dekalog VI. Poland 1988 (58m)
  - screen film before class on Blackboard

Week 6  February 26-March 4

Wednesday
- Reading
  - Spinoza, Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (1677), chapter 4 “On the divine law.”
- Evening Lecture
  - Spinoza Series I: Historical and Biographical Background
    - Yitzhak Melamed, Johns Hopkins University
    - 7:30 p.m. Davis Auditorium: Skidmore College

Friday
- Reading

Week 7  March 5-11

Monday
- Paper #1 due at beginning of class

Wednesday
- Reading
  - Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” (1973)

Thursday
- Evening Lecture
  - Spinoza Series II: Spinoza's Metaphysics and Epistemology
    - Michael Della Rocca, Yale University
    - 7:30 p.m. Davis Auditorium: Skidmore College

Friday
- James, “The Moral Philosopher & The Moral Life” (1891)
- Paper #2 assigned
Week 8    March 12-18
Wednesday
•  Spring Break
Friday
•  Spring Break

How Do We Know?

Week 9    March 19-25
Wednesday
•  Introduction to Epistemology and Metaphysics
•  Reading
  o  Descartes, *Meditations* (1641), prefatory notes & chapter 1
Friday
•  Reading
  o  Descartes, *Meditations* (1641), chapter 2

Week 10  March 26-April 1
Wednesday
•  Reading
  o  Descartes, *Meditations* (1641), chapters 3 & 4
•  Evening Lecture
  o  *Spinoza Series III*: Spinoza’s Political Philosophy
    ▪  Hasana Sharp, McGill University
    ▪  7:30 p.m. Davis Auditorium: Skidmore College
Friday
•  Reading
  o  Descartes, *Meditations* (1641), chapters 5

Week 11    April 2-8
Wednesday
•  Peer Review of Paper #2 Rough Drafts
  o  Bring your Paper!
Friday
•  Paper #2 due at noon
•  Reading
  o  Locke, An Essay on Human Understanding (1689)
Week 12  April 9-15
Wednesday
• Reading
  o Locke, *An Essay on Human Understanding* (1689)
Friday
• Reading
  o Peirce, “The Fixation of belief” (1877)

Week 13  April 16-22
Wednesday
• Reading
  o Peirce, “How to make our ideas clear” (1877)
  • Paper #3 Assigned
Friday
• Reading

Week 14  April 23-29
• Reading
Friday
• Sharing of Paper #3 ideas
• Wrap-up discussion

Week 15  April 30- May 6
Wednesday
• Academic Festival

Week 16  May 7-13
Finals week
• Paper #3 due, exact date TBA