**Introduction to Philosophy**

Instructor: W. Swedlow

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**Description:**

What philosophy is can often be quite vague. There is definitely no one agreed upon definition of philosophy, and many philosophers spend a lot of time trying to produce just such a thing. But we won’t worry about that here. For this class, our main goal is to learn to think, write and speak critically through analyzing, critiquing, and producing arguments. We will therefore not try to define philosophy, or attempt to give ourselves a sense that we know what philosophy is. Rather, it is hoped that you will come away from this class with questions and ways of attacking those questions. So this class is, as you can see, not about answers. It’s not about finding the right answer or destroying your classmate’s or textbook’s stupid argument, but rather about digging into the logic of things, understanding the architecture of an argument, imagining ways to rebuild it, and *sometimes* destroying it. But arguments are not like buildings in this way—you can’t just blow them up in one fell swoop. You have to learn how they are built before you can take them down.

Therefore, there will be two general things that we will want to focus on:

1. *Analyzing arguments*. We will do this by reading primary texts from the philosophical tradition. Reading a text in philosophy is not like reading a magazine, a newspaper, a piece of literature, or even a history text. You have to deal with complicated arguments that will not be obvious on a first reading. Therefore we will be reading slowly and talking to one another a lot about what’s going on in the text.
2. *Formulating arguments in our own words*. The papers, as well as the class discussion, will be exercises in applying your abilities to work with arguments. Hence the main focus in them should generally be an explanation of the arguments you are reading (say in Locke or Kant). On top of that, later in the class you will take a swing at taking your own position on one or more of these writers.

More specifically, a number of other goals will be placed before you:

1. A solid understanding of the ideas of major thinkers within the history of philosophy
2. A solid grasp of the major concept and arguments within the history of philosophy
3. Transfer of critical thinking to everyday life and experiences
4. Preparation for critical analysis of high level texts in any subject at the college level

Lastly, you will also walk away for this course with a solid foundation in the history of philosophical ideas and issues. This will help make you a great conversationalist at cocktail and dinner parties.

**Format:**

The class will be a combination of lecture and discussion formats. New ideas will be introduced through lectures and close readings of the texts, and the ideas will be examined and expanded upon in class discussion.

**Honors vs. Regular Students:**

The class is mixed with honors and regular students. Any student who wants to participate in honors can simply elect to do so by telling me after the first full paper, which should be about a month and half into the semester. Any student who wants to pull out of the honors section may do so by consultation with me. How the two are distinguished:

1. Regular Students: students who enroll as regular students are required to participate in the class and write shorter essays (three pages). These essays will be graded simply for understanding of the basic ideas covered in the class. When checking notes, I will be looking for basic concepts written down to indicate that you are following the ideas and discussion. Online participation will require one to show a minimum answer to whatever discussion topic is posed. The grading of essays and participation will take place according to regular high school levels. Students do not have to participate in a protocol, but may if they wish to.
2. Honors Students: students enrolled at the honors level will receive a full grade point increase for any grade at C or above. In order to achieve this, students must show the following:
   1. Essays written at a college level (we will go over examples). These essays must show comprehension of ideas as well as original, complex arguments. They will also tend to be longer—anywhere from three to five or more pages.
   2. Engaged participation in class and online discussions, including relevant questions, additions, and arguments.
   3. Extensive notes on lectures and readings
   4. At least one protocol per semester.

**Requirements:**

1. This class will be both lecture and discussion-based, but mostly discussion based. The 30% of your grade for discussion will rest entirely on your level of active participation, which includes listening, speaking, and responding. That is, participation means speaking in class about the texts we are reading, what other people are saying, or saying what you *think* about an issue at hand, but in reference to the text we are reading. Thus if you don’t do the reading, discussion will either be non-existent or devolve into an opinion fest, which is the opposite of philosophy.

2. At some point in the course, we have honors students presenting a protocol on the ideas covered during that week or the reading we are focusing on. When you sign up for a protocol, the day you sign in for is the day you give your protocol. All of you who sign up for the same day will have to work together and will receive a single grade for the whole thing.

3. We will also be engaging in online discussion groups that will be a part of your discussion grade.

4. Students will have their notes checked at certain points during the semester—taking notes is required for understanding, reviewing, and writing papers.

5. Your essays are where you will show your understanding of the texts, ideas, and implications of what we have covered. We will discuss them in more detail as the course progresses.

**General Grade Breakdown:**

Discussion (Protocol: Will count towards honors discussion grade): 30%

Notes: 10%

Papers: 30%

Final: 30%

## Texts and supplemental instructional materials

Primary Text: *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Paperback) Oxford University Press, USA; ISBN-10: 0195169247/ISBN-13: 978-0195169249

Cost: $77.95

Teacher handouts

Films: *The Matrix*, *Waking Life*, *Heathers*, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Others to be determined

**Semester 1: Ancient To Modern Philosophy**

1. Pre-Socratics: Handout from *Presocartic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, Catherine Osborne. Oxford University Press, 2004. Film: *Waking Life*

Assignment: Students will create their own philosophy about the origins and nature of the world (cosmology and ontology)

1. Plato & Aristotle: Plato: Sections from *The Republic*, *Apology: Defense of Socrates*; Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* (from reader) Film: *The Matrix*

Assignment: Essay analyzing the main components of either Plato or Aristotle

1. Empiricism: Handouts from Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Assignment: Essay analyzing the main issues in empiricism

1. Rationalism & Skepticism: Readings--René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*; David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (from reader)

Assignment: Group presentations comparing empiricism to rationalism

1. Kant: Reading--handout from *Critique of Pure Reason* (from reader)

Assignment and Final: Essay examining Kant’s response to the problem of skepticism

**Semester 2: Contemporary Philosophy & Issues in Philosophy**

1. Ethics: Jeremy Bentham, *The Principle of Utility*; Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*; J. L. Mackie, *The Subjectivity of Values*;Review of Aristotelian Ethics (from reader) Film: *The Dark Night or Buffy The Vampire Slayer*

Assignment: individual presentations covering main issues in ethics, a major ethical dilemma, and the best solution for it

1. Free Will: David Hume, Of Liberty and Necessity; Richard Taylor, *Freedom and Determinism* (from reader)

Assignment: Essay on the issue of free will

1. Political Philosophy: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Racisms* (from reader); Handouts from Hobbes, Locke & Arendt Film: *Heathers*

Assignment: Essay on issues in political philosophy

1. 20th Century Philosophy: Handouts from Wittgenstein, Heidegger, & Foucault.

Final Essay on modern philosophy

**Various Stipulations:**

1. No late papers without an excuse. Every day a paper is late, it drops a whole grade. This includes all holidays and weekends.

2. Type all papers. Nothing handwritten will be accepted.

3. Keep a copy of everything you turn in–if I lose it or something happens to it, you may need to resubmit it.

4. A portion of your grade on your papers falls under rules of general grammatical correctness.

5. **Each paper must be titled, stapled, double spaced, contain a bibliography, and have page numbers.**

6. All essays must be submitted to Turnitin.com

7. You must come to class with your materials, not your iphone.

8. If you have a problem, know you will be absent in advance, think things are going strangely, etc., please come and talk to me as early as possible.

9. You are responsible for remembering the above stipulations. You are also responsible for reading the stipulations for paper lengths and so on

10. I reserve the right to change these rules at will.

Progress Reporting

Grades shall be reported at the end of each progress reporting period for all students. Progress reports will be mailed home and/or accessible to parents online approximately every five/six weeks. Whenever a student falls below a C- after the second Progress Report for either semester, the teacher shall arrange a conference with the student’s parent/guardian and/or send a written report. (Board Policy 5121)