

PHILOSOPHY 101
PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

University of Oregon
Summer 2013
CRN: 42425

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I. Required Materials

(T) Blackburn, *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy* (available at campus bookstore)
(D) Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (available at campus bookstore)
(CP) Course Packet (available at Copy Shop on 13th Ave.)

II. Course Description

This course will provide an introduction to traditional problems in Western philosophy through representative classical and contemporary texts, as well as through films and literature. Philosophy is presented here as a process of inquiry in which one questions both common sense and one's own tacitly held assumptions in order to achieve a clarified understanding of the nature and practice of knowledge, ethics, and social and political life. Put a bit more casually, philosophy is a process of asking questions about and trying to understand the ways that we relate to the world in which we find ourselves: What makes for a good life? How can we all live together? What difference can thinking make to any of it? How have others thought about these things? Furthermore, you will engage in this process of inquiry yourself through written work and class discussion.

III. Course Objectives

1. A basic knowledge of the key figures, traditions, and subject matter of the history of Western philosophy.
2. The ability to analyze arguments through careful reading and response to assigned texts.
3. The ability to synthesize divergent and distinct perspectives.
4. The ability to produce one's own arguments.
5. The ability to engage in philosophical inquiry.
6. The ability to engage thoughtfully and respectfully in shared inquiry.
7. An awareness of the contemporary relevance of philosophical inquiry.
8. An awareness of the criticisms of philosophy as centered in the views and prejudices of socio-politically dominant persons.

IV. Course Requirements

Reading-response essay (workshop plus completed reading response): 15%

First essay: 15%

Second essay: 25%

Final essay: 30%

In-class participation: 15%

Ideas in action (CHOOSE ONE OPTION):

On the Course Schedule, you will notice several options for “Ideas in action.” These are literary sources or films that will allow you to think about our weekly topics in relation to a non-philosophical source. You will pick ONE of these options and incorporate it into your essay for that week. For example, during the week that we are studying knowledge and rationality, you will be given the option to read one of two novels and write about it in conversation with the philosophical material that we cover for Week 2. This is an opportunity for you to put “ideas in action.”

Reading response essay:

To ease you into writing about philosophy, your first essay will be about your reactions to the material that we cover in the first week. Even though this is a reading response, the paper ought to be well-organized, with an introduction, a theme, and text citations. The reading response can be anywhere between 3 and 5 pages in length, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman, with 1” margins. We will workshop these first assignments. If this goes well, we will do the same thing for the following papers. You will email the drafts of your reading responses to me and your workshop groups by Thursday afternoon. Then, for the first half of class on Friday, you will meet together to discuss your feedback on each other’s essays.

First essay:

Your first formal essay will be on the subject of the philosophy of knowledge. You will be given a choice of topics, including incorporating an “Ideas in action” option. This paper will be 4–5 pages in length, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman, with 1” margins.

Second essay:

Your second essay will be much like the first, only this time the topic will be ethics.

Final essay:

Your final essay can be up to 6 or 7 pages in length. It will be on the topic of political philosophy. You will also be required to find an example from contemporary politics to help you illustrate the ideas from the week. You should find a reliable source to provide the information for this example. You can also do this while incorporating the Viramontes novel, if you choose to wait until the final essay to choose an “Ideas in action” option. If you do this, then it would be best to focus on the topics of immigration or migrant workers’ living conditions, as these are relevant to Viramontes’ novel.

V. Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities will be provided with fair access. Please contact me immediately with any need for accommodation.

VI. Academic Honesty

Any suspected incidents of plagiarism, cheating, and fabrication will be investigated. If confirmed, these violations of academic honesty will result in a failing grade. Student misconduct is defined at: conduct.uoregon.edu. Please contact me with any questions that you may have regarding what constitutes academic dishonesty.

COURSE EVALUATION

In order to successfully contribute to our classroom discussion and to complete the assigned work in this class, it is expected that you will come to class having prepared by carefully reading the assigned texts AT LEAST ONCE, if not twice or three times. The classroom activity will not simply be centered around a lecture in which I explain to you all that you need to know about the assigned text. Rather, discussion and lecture will assume a decent familiarity (if not grasp of) the material, which can only be achieved by reading it in advance. Our conversations ought to help you gain greater clarity on the texts. Then, in writing assignments, you will be expected to deepen your understanding of the texts even further through explaining their meaning and, further, what they mean to you, personally.

Grading Scale

	A=93% or above	A-=90-92%
B+=87-89%	B=83-86%	B-=80-82%
C+=77-79%	C=73-76%	C-=70-72%
D+=67-69%	D=63-66%	D-=60-62%
F=59% or below		

Paper Grading Rubric

A=Excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or another.

B=Good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.

C=OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.

D=Poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.

F=Failing. Problematic on all fronts, indicating either no real grasp of the material or complete lack of effort.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Philosophy and Reason

M: Introduction

T: Blackburn, "Introduction" (T); hooks, from *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, "Talking Back" (distributed in class)

W: Plato, "Apology of Socrates" (CP)

R: Arendt, from *The Life of the Mind*, "The Answer of Socrates" (CP); sections of film, "Examined Life," featuring Cornel West (we will watch the film in class)

F: **Reading response workshop, in class;** Blackburn, Ch. 6, "Reasoning" (T)

Week 2: Knowledge

M: **Reading response essay due to Blackboard SafeAssignment by 9:45 a.m.;** Blackburn, Ch. 1, "Knowledge" (T)

T: Blackburn, Ch. 7, "The World"

W: Lakoff and Johnson, from *Philosophy in the Flesh*, "The Embodied Mind" (excerpt)

R: James, from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, "The Reality of the Unseen" (CP)

F: Crenshaw, "Intersectionality and Identity Politics: Learning from Violence Against Women of Color" (CP)

Ideas in action, Option 1: *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros (on reserve)

Ideas in action, Option 2: *The Hummingbird's Daughter: A Novel*, Luis Alberto Urrea (on reserve)

Week 3: Ethics

M: **Paper 1 due to Blackboard SafeAssignment by 9:45 a.m.;** Blackburn, Ch. 8, "What to Do" (T); clip, Three Minute Philosopher: "Immanuel Kant" (we will watch the clip in class)

T: Arendt, excerpts from "Eichmann in Jerusalem" (CP)

W: Beauvoir, from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "Ambiguity" and "Conclusion" (CP)

R: Nielsen, "A Defense of Utilitarianism"; Williams, "Against Utilitarianism" (CP)

F: Appiah, from *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, "Kindness to Strangers" (CP)

Ideas in action, Option 3: "Beyond the Labels" (film, on reserve)

Ideas in action Option 4: "The Dark Knight" (film, on reserve)

Week 4: Society and Politics

M: **Paper 2 due to Blackboard SafeAssignment by 9:45 a.m.;** Darwin, "The Descent of Man" (CP)

T: Marx, excerpts from *The German Ideology* (CP)

W: Dewey, Chs. 1 and 2, *Liberalism and Social Action* (D)

R: Dewey, Ch. 3, *Liberalism and Social Action* (D)

F: West, from *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism*, "The Deep Democratic Tradition in America" (CP)

Ideas in action, Option 5: *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Helena Maria Viramontes (on reserve)

Final paper due Monday, 10:00 a.m., to Blackboard SafeAssignment.