Philosophy 101: Philosophical Problems

Course Description

What is Philosophy? One way of addressing this question is to point out that “philosophy” begins where assumption and opinion breakdown. This is to say that philosophy proposes problems, and the problems philosophy proposes lead to the development of critical ways of thinking, examining, and conceptualizing. This term I want us to think carefully about the problems implicit in the politics of speech, truth, self, responsibility, time, and history. We will approach each theme where our assumptions breakdown and become problematic. We may find that by examining these problems, we will also be led to examine a great many other topics as well. Each reading is intended to provide some framework, background, and/or challenge, but each reading is also intended to spark your own ideas or sets of reflections.

This class is designed as an “introduction to philosophy.” Our goal is to develop the critical thinking skills required for understanding philosophical thinking, reading, and writing. The difficulty of the texts themselves varies from quite easy to very difficult. You will need to allow for the appropriate time and effort to understand the readings themselves as well as time to understand why they are part of this class. We will engage historical texts from the cannon of Western philosophical thought, but we will also be engaged in a rereading of these texts to see what problem they pose to our way of thinking now. Because of this, your ideas, thoughts, impressions, and critiques are as important a text for this class as any of the readings we will do. I will need you to plan on being prepared to participate this term and I will also need you to be engaged in our discussion.

Required Texts


The Course Packet (CP) readings are posted to Blackboard under Documents.
**Attendance and Participation**

Both attendance and participation are required for you to get the most out of the class. More than three unexcused absences during the term will result in a decrease of 1/3 of your final grade. Your grade will decrease by 1/3 for every additional unexcused absence.

**Note:** Participation accounts for 15% of your grade. Participation includes constructively participating in discussion during class, being prepared for class, and showing that you are engaged in the class by the quality of your work, comments and respect for your peers.

**Note:** You will need to bring your text to every class. You may be asked to leave if you are not prepared for class.

**Note:** Texting, checking your cell phone, iphone, etc. are all distracting behaviors and considered as forms of not participating. Also, laptops are only allowed for those folks who cannot take notes otherwise. If you have a reason for needing to use your laptop during class, please let me know ASAP, and accommodations will be made. All other use of laptops during class time is prohibited and will be considered a violation of the participation policy for this class.

**Assignments**

**Midterms:** Your midterms will be analytic essays focused on explicating one author’s argument relative to one theme, or compare two author’s arguments to one theme. In both cases, I ask that you close the paper by stating your own thoughts and providing one or two plausible reasons for your position. I will give you two options to write on for your essay, or you may propose your own topic. If you are going to write on your own topic, you will need to clear it with me first. Each midterm should not exceed three double spaced pages. Be sure to spell check, cite your sources, and read over your work before turning it in. You will be penalized for poorly prepared papers.

**Final:** Your final will be in the same format as the midterms, but will ask you to draw comparisons between earlier material and the last segment of the class. Your final paper should be no longer than 5 pages, double-spaced.

**Grading**

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Individual Differences

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don’t hesitate to consult with me. If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully demonstrating your abilities, you should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure your full participation and facilitate your education process. The university offers a wide range of services to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements, including the following:

*Academic Learning Services (ALS):* ALS provides numerous resources (including courses, workshops, and tutoring) to help UO students succeed. They work with a diverse student body with a wide range of needs. If you are unsure which resources would work best, they are happy to answer questions and share suggestions. Web: [http://als.uoregon.edu](http://als.uoregon.edu) – Phone: 541-346-3226

*University Counseling and Testing Center (UCTC):* The UCTC provides comprehensive mental health care and testing services to the University of Oregon campus. The primary mission of the UCTC is to provide quality clinical/therapeutic services, psychological testing and assessment, psychoeducational workshops and outreach as well as emergency services. Web: [http://www.uoregon.edu/~counsel/](http://www.uoregon.edu/~counsel/) – Phone: 541-346-3227

*Disability Services (DS):* DS coordinates services, provides advocacy and support to students with documented physical, learning, and psychological disabilities and provides assistance to the general campus community in responding appropriately to requests for accommodations based on disability. Web: [http://ds.uoregon.edu/](http://ds.uoregon.edu/) – Phone: 541-346-1155 TTY: 541-346-1088

Academic Honesty

All work that you hand in must be your own. If it is not your own or you have taken significant portions of someone else’s work you will be subject to all penalties that apply to plagiarism according to the University of Oregon policy. Violation of the Academic Honesty policy is considered a crime by the department of philosophy and the University of Oregon and will be punished. This includes failing the class and/or expulsion from the University. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the UO policy on Plagiarism: go to [http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/duck_guide/duckguide.htm](http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/duck_guide/duckguide.htm).

Note: Wikipedia, Sparknotes, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, answers.com, etc. are fair places to get general information, but these sources will not help you significantly with this class. Online sources may be consulted for developing your own knowledge of a thinker/concept, but not for building your own thought. Any material that is taken from these and other online sources that is not cited in your work is considered plagiarism and will be handled in the same manner.

Note: The best resource you have for more information and direction on your work is me.
Reading Schedule

Week 1
M: Introduction to Philosophy: What is Philosophy? What are the problems of Philosophy?
T: Plato, Alcibiades CP
W: Plato, Apology CP
TH: Plato, Apology continued

Week 2
M: Martin Luther King Holiday, No School
T: Augustine, Book 1-5
W: Augustine, Confessions Book 6-8
TH: Augustine, Confessions 9-11

Week 3
M: What is truth? What are the problems of Truth? Plato and Augustine, no new readings, First Midterm Due
T: Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation I & II
W: Descartes Meditation III & IV
TH: Descartes Meditation V & VI; Correspondence

Week 4
M: Hume, CP and Kant, Prolegomena, Preface
T: Kant, First Part, p. 1-37
W: Kant, Second Part and Third Part, p. 38-68
TH: Kant, Conclusion, Solution p. 69-110 (reading the Appendix is optional)

Week 5
M: What is Modernism? What are the Problems of the Moderns? No new readings: Descartes/Hume/Kant
T: Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle Ch. 1, 2 and 3
W: Freud, Ch. 4, and 5
TH: Freud, Ch. 6 and 7
Week 6

M: Culture, Truth, and Subjectivity (No new readings) **Second Midterm due**

T: Emerson, “The American Scholar” and Kafka, “Report to an Academy” **CP**

W: Sartre, “The Humanism of Existentialism” **CP**

TH: Freud, Sartre and Kafka continued, No new readings

Week 7

M: Adorno “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda” *Culture Industry* and Gasset, “The Primitive and the Technical” **CP* found in *Revolt of the Masses**

T: Adorno, continue and Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Part One, Two, and Three (focus on the Mama’s “forgetting” and Kundera’s use of “laughter”)

W: Kundera, Part Four, Five, and Six (focus on Tamina and the definition of *Litost*)

TH: Kundera, Part Seven and Eight (focus on Kundera’s use of “forgetting” and “borders”)

Week 8

M: Gasset, “Primitivism and History,” “The Self-Satisfied Age,” and “The Barbarism of Specialization” **CP**

T: Gasset, “The Greatest Danger, the State” **CP**

W: Gasset, “Who Rules the World?” **CP**

TH: No new readings: What is Culture? What are the problems of Culture, part 1? Gasset/Adorno/Kundera **Third Midterm Due**

Week 9

M: Gasset, “The Dehumanization of Art” **CP**

T: Adorno, “On the Fetishistic Character of Music and the Regression of Listening” *Culture Industry*

W: Adorno continued and Benjamin, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility” **CP**

TH: Benjamin, continued

Week 10

M: Adorno, “Transparencies on Film” *Culture Industry*

T: Adorno, continued

W: No new readings, Gasset/Adorno/Benjamin: What is Culture? What are the problems of Culture, part 2? **CP**

TH: safety hatch

**Final Due TBD**