

Introduction:

The study of philosophy more resembles a journey of discovery than a fixed body of facts to be mastered. A grasp of philosophy's concerns and methods requires persistent searching. Philosophy Honors encourages critical inquiry, debate, and reflection upon fundamental questions about the human condition and your beliefs regarding them.

Philosophy Honors will address readings from philosophers, classical and modern, thought experiments, as well as short works of literature and films which imaginatively explore philosophical issues. Although the course will be partly historical—philosophers often work with one eye fixed on their own traditions—it will be organized around a set of central themes or issues: the nature of truth, ethics, free will and determinism, the rationality of religious belief, the problem of evil, the mind-body problem, personal identity, and the meaning of human existence.

The class aims toward five objectives:

- To acquaint students with the ideas, methods, and issues central to philosophy;
- To provide students with an intellectual foundation for the study of contemporary issues;
- To invite self-reflection and an inquiring attitude toward basic questions;
- To sharpen students' critical thinking and ability to analyze and write arguments with clarity and precision;
- To apply philosophical concepts and perspectives in students' own lives and decision-making.

Texts:

- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/>) and Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<https://plato.stanford.edu/>), frequently accessed through Actively Learn (<https://www.activelylearn.com/>)
- Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha*
- Pdfs of additional readings (accessible via Canvas)

Assignments and Evaluation:

Careful reading of all assigned material is critical for both a firm grasp of philosophical issues and the ability to contribute meaningfully to class discussion. In addition to daily reading, students will be assigned **periodic brief essays** on major topics each quarter; occasional **group projects** (e.g., debates, role-plays, presentations); and **tests** that involve explaining and applying key concepts. **Class participation** supports philosophical inquiry and will represent ca.15% of students' grades.

Reading and Writing:

Mastering philosophical concepts cannot be accomplished without engaging written arguments, demonstrations, and examples. Though we will not be using a textbook in the course, our primary resource for addressing the basic concepts in Philosophy will be the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) and Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP), and I strongly recommend that you consult them frequently, both as assigned and as your interests take you on a particular topic.

Philosophical inquiry also involves formulating and expressing one's ideas and arguments. This class will not involve any major research papers; the typical writing assignment will consist of several brief papers of 2-3 pages in which students are asked to set forth *clearly* and *precisely* the philosophical issues and articulate their own positions. We may also use the Discussion feature on Canvas to facilitate the exchange of ideas and to provide further opportunities for those reluctant in class.

Participation and Discussion:

Discussion is group inquiry, not merely group talk. We will try to understand the readings and reach understandings on the important issues they raise. Group inquiry only works when the insights of many people are made public. It requires that these perspectives be received with tolerance but subjected to respectful scrutiny and criticism. For these reasons, you should feel free, unafraid, and positively encouraged to speak your mind even when you suspect that others may disagree. You may feel uneasy, but I will be pulling for you. You should reflect before speaking, build on previous comments, help discover the meaning that others are struggling to express, be open to persuasion, and bend to the weight of evidence and reasoning. You must be prepared to substantiate your factual and textual claims, to defend your value judgments, to show the connections between your premises and conclusions, and to use the diversity of insights and perspectives in the class to advance your understanding of the readings and their themes. The ultimate premise of class discussion is that each of us can learn from one another; otherwise, we would read alone and never meet. If you accept the principle that discussion is group inquiry, then your uncertainty about a question is a good reason to

speak, not a good reason to remain silent. If you don't have answers, but feel uncertain, then you can help the cause by asking questions to home in on what is difficult.

I understand that some people are shy, some intimidated, and some simply pre-empted by others' comments. I will try to maintain an atmosphere in which each student's contribution is welcomed and respected, and otherwise look primarily to the quality of oral contributions. **Note for the reserved:** quality of oral contributions cannot be judged from a sample of zero. **Note for the talkative:** quality of oral contributions is not a function of quantity. Good discussions require good listening and good will. Aim for a balance between being persuasive and being "persuasive." If you want respect, insights, and a healthy balance of speaking and listening from others, you must give the same to them.

Topics, Issues, Activities, Readings, and Assignments

Unit 1: Introduction and Logic

- **Issue: What is philosophy and what is its value in modern life?**
Activities: Discussion of readings and examination of thought experiments (TEs).
Readings: Bertrand Russell, *Philosophy for Laymen*
Films/Clips: *Dead Poet's Society*

- **Issue: What are the rules of valid thinking about ideas?**
Activities: Exercises in logical thinking. Logic Challenge
Readings: Logic Overview, pp. 1-8

Unit 2: Metaphysics—The Nature of Ultimate Reality

- **Issue: The Mind-Body Problem: What am I? A mind, a body, a quality? How might these interact?**
Activities: Informal debate on what constitutes a mind.
Readings: "Dualism and Mind" (IEP)
Searle, "Why I Am Not a Property Dualist"
Films/Clips: "Mind Talk" (Films for the Humanities)
Essay: State the mind-body problem as precisely as possible. What is the most appropriate way to think of the "mind"? Defend your position.

- **Issue: Is artificial intelligence possible? Is it desirable?**
Activities: Group presentations on artificial intelligence. Examination of TEs.
Readings: "Functionalism and AI" (IEP)
Films/Clips: *Star Trek* ("Commander Data")

- **Issue: Personal Identity: What is a person? Are persons substances, souls, psychological properties, processes? Is life after death possible/probable?**
Activities: Definitions of personal identity. Discussion of readings. Examination of TEs.
Readings: “Personal Identity” (SEP)
Films/Clips: *Memento*
 John Weldon’s *To Be*
Essay: What is/are the essential characteristic(s) of a person? How is it possible that our identity can persist through time despite the changes we undergo?

- **Issue: Free Will and Determinism: What is a free act? Do we ever act freely? Is moral responsibility compatible with determinism? Why do we or should we want to possess a free will?**
Activities: Examination of TEs. Debate between libertarians, hard determinists, and soft determinists (compatibilists).
Readings: “Free Will and Determinism” (IEP)
Film/Clips: *Groundhog Day*
Essay: Do humans have free will? Explain the implications of your position for the related issue of moral responsibility.

INTERLUDE 1—FRIENDSHIP: WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIP IN OUR LIVES? HOW DOES THE NATURE OF FRIENDSHIP DIFFER FROM THE OTHER PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS?

ACTIVITIES: DISCUSSION OF READINGS. SURVEY OF ATTITUDES.

READINGS: ARISTOTLE, *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS* (HANDOUT)

MONTAIGNE, *THE ESSAYS* (ON FRIENDSHIP)

ESSAY: DEFINE FRIENDSHIP AND EXPLAIN ITS IMPORTANCE IN YOUR LIFE.

Unit 3: Epistemology—The Search for Knowledge and Truth

- **Issue: Can we be certain of any knowledge at all? If so, how?**
Activities: Examination of TEs. The problem of induction and philosophy of science.
Readings: “Epistemology” (New World Encyclopedia)
 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*
 Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense”
Films/Clips: *Rashomon*
The Matrix
Essay: What does knowledge require? Can we be certain of anything? If so, how?

- **Issue: To what extent does the world correspond to the way in which we perceive it?**
Activities: Discussion and examination of epistemological theories.
Readings: Nagel, *What is It Like to be a Bat?*
http://members.aol.com/NeoNoetics/Nagel_Bat.html

- **Issue: How do you know when you have knowledge? What are the conditions for knowledge?**
Activities: Activities with Gettier problems and Justified True Belief (JTB)
Readings: Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"
<http://www.ditext.com/gettier/gettier.html>

INTERLUDE 2—LOVE: IS LOVE MORE THAN SIMPLY A NEUROCHEMICAL RESPONSE TO STIMULI? WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOVE? HOW DOES LOVE PLAY A ROLE IN A LIFE WELL LIVED?
ACTIVITIES: DISCUSSION OF READINGS. SURVEY OF ATTITUDES.
READINGS: C.S. LEWIS, *THE FOUR LOVES*
 H. HARLOW, *THE NATURE OF LOVE*
<http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Harlow/Love.htm>
ESSAY: PROVIDE AN ARTIFACT (VIDEO CLIP, SONG, POEM, ETC.) THAT PROVIDES A PERSPECTIVE ON LOVE THAT RESONATES WITH YOU.

Unit 4: Philosophy of Religion

- **Issue: Is religious belief rational? Provable? Should religious belief be purely a matter of faith?**
Activities: Analysis of readings. Debate on rationality of religious belief.
Readings: Dawkins and Collins, "God vs. Science" (TIME magazine)
 "Philosophy of Religion" (IEP)
Films/Clips: *Contact*
Evolution: Darwin's Dangerous Idea
Essay: Is it and should it be a matter of reason to believe in God? Evaluate what you consider to be the most compelling argument for belief in a Supreme Being.

- **Issue: Is the belief in an all-powerful and all-good God compatible with the presence of human evil and suffering?**
Activities: Definition of evil. Film analysis. Discussion of *Siddhartha*.
Readings: B.C. Johnson, "The Problem of Evil"
<http://utintrotophilosophy.blogspot.com/2006/02/problem-from-evil-and-bc-johnson.html>
 Hick, *There is a Reason Why God Allows Evil*
 Smullyan, "God is a Taoist"

Hesse, *Siddhartha*

Films/Clips: *Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero (9/11)*

Shadowlands

Essay: How, if it all, is it possible to reconcile belief in an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving God with the existence of (unnecessary) suffering and natural and moral evil?

INTERLUDE 3—HAPPINESS: WHAT IS HAPPINESS AND WHY IF AT ALL SHOULD BE PURSUE IT? HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM PLEASURE? DO MATERIAL GOODS PROVIDE HAPPINESS? CAN SOMEONE BE UNWORTHY OF THEIR HAPPINESS?

ACTIVITIES: TAKE SURVEY ON-LINE.

READINGS: EPICURUS QUOTES

([HTTPS://WWW.GOODREADS.COM/AUTHOR/QUOTES/114041.EPICURUS](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/114041.Epicurus))

MODERN PSYCHOLOGY ARTICLE ON WELL-BEING

ESSAY: WRITE A BRIEF STATEMENT OF WHAT CONSTITUTES A HAPPY LIFE. ARE THERE ANY ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS THAT ALL PEOPLE WILL OR SHOULD SHARE?

Unit 5: Ethics

- **Issue**: Ethical Relativism: Do objective ethical norms exist? If so, how?

Activities: Analysis of cases. Raging River Moral Dilemma and TEs.

Readings: “Student Relativism”

“Ethics” (IEP)

Essay: Evaluate the argument for cultural relativism. Does it seem convincing that there exist objective or intrinsic moral principles? If so, how?

- **Issue**: Consequentialism: Should the morality of an action be judged according to its individual or social utility?

Activities: Examination of TEs. Application of criteria for evaluating utilitarianism.

Music to test Mill’s distinction between high and low pleasures.

Readings: Singer, *The Case for Animal Liberation* (handout)

LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from the Omelas”

(<http://engl210-deykute.wikispaces.umb.edu/file/view/omelas.pdf>)

- **Issue**: Deontological Ethics: Should the morality of an action be judged according to its form or adherence to a specific duty?

Activities: Analysis and application of Kant’s First and Second Categorical Imperatives to cases. Simulation of original position and veil of ignorance.

Readings: Kant, *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals* (excerpt)

Film/Clips: *Gone, Baby Gone*

- **Issue: Virtue Ethics: Does morality consist primarily in the development of individual character rather than resolving particular acts?**
Activity: Student presentations on figures who exemplify virtues.
Readings: David Brooks, "The Moral Bucket List"
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/opinion/sunday/david-brooks-the-moral-bucket-list.html? r=0>)
Essay: What do we mean by moral terms such as "good/bad," "right/wrong," or "should"? Are these terms meaningful? Was Hume correct when he stated that "one cannot get an 'ought' from an 'is'"?
Films/Clips: Harry Potter clips and application to virtue ethics.

- **Issue: Does existentialism offer a viable, credible alternative to traditional moral theories? What is the relationship between consciousness and freedom?**
Activities: Discussion of readings. Performance of Sartre's *No Exit*.
Readings: Sartre, "Existentialism and Humanism"
Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*
Films/Clips: *Crimes and Misdemeanors*
Essay: Analyze the authenticity of the main characters' moral actions in the film.

- **Issue: Ethics Bowl: Apply and defend your assigned theory to the specific cases.**
Activity: Students will provided a set of cases and develop an ethical analysis from the perspective of their assigned ethical theory. Groups will present their findings and critique those of others.
Readings: Packet of cases.
Essay: Choose ONE of the following ethical theories and demonstrate how it would form the basis for the best society: egoism, utilitarianism, Kantianism, virtue ethics. Use 1-2 specific thought experiments or cases to support your reasoning.

CODA—THE MEANING OF LIFE: WHAT CONTRIBUTION CAN RELIGION OR ANY OTHER BELIEF SYSTEM MAKE TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEANING OF HUMAN EXISTENCE? IS THE HUMAN NEED FOR MEANING A PHILOSOPHICAL OR A PSYCHOLOGICAL QUESTION?

ACTIVITY: FIND AN ARTICLE THAT EXPRESSES YOUR VIEW.

READINGS:

FILMS: ABOUT SCHMIDT

ESSAY: WHY DO WE ASSOCIATE MEANINGFULNESS WITH THE IDEAL OF PERMANENCE (E.G., PARADISE, NIRVANA, IMMORTALITY)? CAN LIFE BE MEANINGFUL YET IMPERMANENT? EXPLAIN.

