

Three Rivers Community College
Syllabus for Introduction to Philosophy
Fall 2011; Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4-5:15

Instructor: Carol Stanland

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Office Hours:

Required Text: Hallman, Max. Traversing Philosophical Boundaries (4th ed.)

Additional reading as assigned

Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to some of the basic concepts and questions of philosophy, and to the ways various people and cultures have addressed these questions. We will explore several of the main branches of philosophy in four ways: reading, interpreting, and discussing philosophical texts; reading, interpreting, and discussing literary writings that address philosophical themes; watching and discussing films that concern philosophical issues; and finally, applying philosophical concepts to our own life-situations.

Following the format of the textbook, we will proceed by exploring a series of philosophical questions. Approximately EVERY OTHER CLASS, you will be expected to choose ONE reading from that week's selection, and come to class with the written (hand or computer) answers to the questions at the BEGINNING of that section. The questions are intended to help you to dissect the meaning of the reading. In class, we will talk about ALL the readings and themes in each section that we cover. For example, the first question under chapter 1 in the table of contents is "Do We Have an Essential Self or Soul?" Your first assignment will be to choose ONE of the readings numbered 1, 2, 3, or 5. If you choose John Locke's "On Personal Identity", you will do the reading, then write out the answers to the questions at the bottom of page 11. NOTE: DO NOT ASSUME that the shorter readings are necessarily the easiest. Challenge yourself throughout the course of the semester to choose at least a couple of the longer readings as well.

On the class days where you do not have a choice of a reading, everyone will be responsible for reading the same selection. There will be no written homework due on these days. Instead, we will discuss the "Questions for Reading" as a group in class. Therefore, to prepare for class you should have some NOTES TO YOURSELF on the answers to these questions.

There will also be some days, coinciding with paper due dates and test dates, that we will watch a movie that is concerned with one or more philosophical themes. Movie days are not excuses to miss class, leave class, or sleep in class. Questions regarding the movies may appear on the tests.

Course Objectives and Benefits:

1) To strengthen critical and analytical reading and thinking skills. Many readings will be selections from primary sources, that is, writings by the philosophers themselves. These will probably be some of

the most challenging readings you will encounter in college. We will spend some time in the beginning of the semester discussing how to read more actively and improve not only your comprehension of the texts, but also your ability to respond to them. This skill will stand you in good stead during the rest of your college pursuits.

2) To hone verbal and written communication skills, in order to clearly and convincingly argue a well thought-out conviction. We will also devote time at the beginning of the semester learning how to write a philosophical argument. This is another essential skill that will help you throughout your college career and after.

3) To develop an understanding of the underlying philosophical bases for our ordinary ways of thinking and acting. Heighten your self-awareness of your own personal philosophy and your core values.

4) Open your mind! This is the most important objective and benefit of studying philosophy. You will learn to approach questions from several angles and explore concepts using different methods. Along the way, you will learn a great deal about yourself and your world.

Course Requirements:

the textbook, a working trcc email account, and a library card

Class Participation and Homework:

20% of grade. You should come to class fully prepared to discuss the day's topic. Take a stand! Play devil's advocate! There is certainly no such thing as a stupid question or comment, and this is one class in which you will get extra credit for being passionate as long as you argue your views cogently, logically, and with respect for others' viewpoints. Please note that active engagement in class discussions can move a borderline end of semester grade up, whereas lack of participation can drop a borderline grade down.

You are also expected to come to class with the written answers to the reading questions at the beginning of the section you read for that day. Homework will be collected and graded as follows: *check plus* = superior; *check* = acceptable; *check minus* = more effort needed. Homework that is one class session late can receive no higher than a *check*. Homework that is two class sessions late can receive no higher than a *check minus*. Homework that is later than two class sessions late will not be accepted.

A combination of your class participation and homework will comprise the 20% of your grade as noted above.

Exams:

There will be a midterm and a final, EACH of which will constitute 20% of your grade. They will be open book and open notebook, and will be a combination of reading comprehension and short essay questions.

Papers:

You will be expected to write two 4-5 page papers for this class. Each paper is worth 20% of your grade. Guidelines and more information on papers will be given in class; however, the following are brief descriptions of the topics.

Paper #1: Give a full and thoughtful description of yourself, making reference to the philosophers that we have read and discussed. Who are you? What is your identity, and how was it constructed? Do you have an essence? If so, what is it? If not, how do you describe or account for your 'self'? Why have you chosen the framework you have? Extra credit will be given for creativity for this paper!

Paper #2: Choose an ethical dilemma from a television program or movie. Using the philosophers we've read and discussed from chapter 4, explain how the situation could be resolved.

Attendance Policy:

Regular attendance at class meetings is expected. However, I realize that absence is occasionally unavoidable. Please remember that it is polite to inform me if you plan to be absent, and your homework must still be turned in on time via email. Also, you are responsible for obtaining the notes you missed from a classmate. If you are sick or have a family emergency, special permission to turn in homework or papers late, or to make up exams, must be arranged with me.

Academic Integrity:

My expectation is that you will turn in work that is neither plagiarized nor paraphrased. Both are surprising easy for an instructor to detect. Extra credit will always be given for creative thinking. What matters in this course is that you understand the material and show yourself able to apply what you have read to your own life.

Advice:

- 1) Take enough time to do the reading. There is a good chance you won't understand everything you read the first time through, even if you think you do. Plan to read the selection you choose for each class session at least twice. Use a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words, or ask me what they mean.
- 2) Take notes when you read. This makes a huge difference to learning and retention, and it's a great habit to get into, especially since your midterm will be open notebook.

3) There are no right or wrong answers in philosophy, only well or poorly argued ones. Make sure yours are the former, not the latter.

4) Ask for help or clarification if something confuses you. It is my responsibility to help you understand what we're reading or discussing. It is your responsibility to show me where you need help.

Schedule:

Date	Classroom Discussion	Homework
8/30	Review of syllabus	Read ONE of the readings 1, 2, 3, or 5 under the question "Do We Have an Essential Self or Soul?" in Chapter 1; Write out (by hand or computer) the answers to "Questions for Reading" that are at the BEGINNING of your reading selection
9/1	No class- to be made up later in the semester	
9/6	How to read & write philosophically Discuss readings from 8/30	Read David Hume's "There is no Personal Identity", p. 20. Be prepared to discuss "Questions for Reading"
9/8	Discuss Hume	Read Plato's "The Nature of the Soul and It's Relation to the Body", p. 28. Be prepared to discuss "Questions for Reading".
9/13	Discuss Plato	Read ONE of the readings 7, 8, 9, or 11 under "To What Extent Do Our Bodies Determine Who We Are?" Answer "Questions for Reading".
9/15	Discuss readings from 9/13	Read ONE of 14, 15, 16, or 17 under "What Else Determines Who I Am?" Answer "Questions for Reading"
9/20	Discuss readings from 9/15	Work on Paper # 1
9/22	Watch movie	Work on Paper # 1
9/27	Finish movie and discuss	Paper # 1 due; Read Plato's "The Myth of the Cave", p. 177. Be prepared to discuss.
9/29	Discuss Plato	Read one of 11, 12, 13, or 14 under "What is the

		Nature of Reality?" Answer "Questions for Reading".
10/4	Discuss readings from 9/29	Read Descartes' "Meditations on the Nature of Knowledge", p. 227. Be prepared to discuss.
10/6	Discuss Descartes	Read one of 2, 4, 5, or 6 under "How Do We Know What We Know?" Answer "Questions for Reading".
10/11	Discuss readings from 10/6	Read handout.
10/13	Discuss handout	Read one of 11, 13, 14, or 15 under "Is Knowledge Really Attainable?" Answer "Questions for Reading".
10/18	Discuss readings from 10/17	Study for midterm
10/20	Watch movie	Study for midterm
10/25	Midterm	Read one of 1, 2, 4, or 5 under "How Do We Determine What We Ought to Do?" Answer "Questions for Reading".
10/27	Discuss readings from 10/25	Read Immanuel Kant's "The Good Will and Morality", p. 343. Be prepared to discuss.
11/1	Discuss Kant	Read one of 8, 12, or 14 under "What Are Some Reasons for Questioning Traditional Values?" Answer "Questions for Reading"
11/3	Discuss readings from 11/1	Read Aldo Leopold's "The Land Ethic", p. 385. Be prepared to discuss.
11/8	Discuss Leopold	Read Plato's "Crito", p. 425. Be prepared to discuss.
11/10	Discuss Plato	Work on Paper # 2.
11/15	Watch movie	Work on Paper #2.
11/17	Finish movie and discuss	Work on Paper # 2.
11/22	Discuss papers	Read one of 2, 4, 6, or 7 under "What is the Basis of our Obligations to Society?" Answer

		"Questions for Reading".
11/29	Discuss readings from 11/22	Read one of 10, 11, 13, or 14 under "Where Do Our Obligations to Society End?" Answer "Questions for Reading".
12/1	Discuss readings from 11/29	Read Henry David Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience". Be prepared to discuss.
12/6	Discuss Thoreau	Study for final.
12/8	Watch movie	Study for final.
12/13	Finish movie and discuss	Study for final.
12/15	Final Exam	