

Three Rivers Community College
Introduction to Philosophy (PHL K101)
Spring 2012; Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11-12:15; D104

Instructor: Carol Stanland

Email: cstanland@trcc.commnet.edu

Office Hours: before or after class or via email

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 a film that concerns 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 prepared to answer the questions at the BEGINNING of that section. The questions are intended to help you to dissect the meaning of the reading. It is highly recommended that you make some notes to yourself on the answers to these questions in order to facilitate class discussion. 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 make some notes to yourself on 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. The question set at the end of each reading is more speculative, and we will try to take time to get to some of these 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. To prepare for these classes you should likewise have some notes to yourself on the answers to the 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. 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. 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 Preparation:

A significant part of the class will involve discussion of philosophical issues and problems. In order to participate meaningfully in discussion, you must obviously be prepared by having read the assignment for that day. Class discussion makes topics that might otherwise seem rather dry come to life, and the way that they resonate differently for each person in the class makes it possible for a wide variety of perspectives to be aired. Listening to what other people have to say about things makes life interesting and enriches our own understanding. Consequently, class participation is extremely important. Though participation is not graded directly, the more actively you are involved in the class the more likely that your papers will be interesting and your understanding for the exams will be enriched. Students who are active class participants will always be given the benefit of the doubt when grades fall on the line. Don't just sit back! Take a stand! Participate!

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 short essay questions that test your comprehension of the philosophical ideas presented in the reading and through the lectures, and enhanced through class discussions. A sample test question will be provided before the midterm.

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.

Paper #3: Using the philosophies we have read, construct an ideal society. What would the structure of this society be, and why? What form of government would it have? What would its economy be, its educational system, its foreign policy? You can be as creative as you like, but you must ground your statements in philosophical theory, and cite your sources appropriately.

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. If you do not understand what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me or go to the College Writing Center for further explanation. Plagiarism is a serious offense and the consequences are therefore serious as well.

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	In Class	Homework
1/19	Syllabus; Intro to philosophy lecture; Reading + video	Do we have an essential self or soul? Read 1, 2, or 3
1/24	Discuss readings	Read David Hume's "There is No Personal Identity"
1/26	Discuss Hume	Read Plato's "The Nature of the Soul and It's Relation to the Body"
1/31	Discuss Plato	To what extent do our bodies determine who we are? Read 7, 8, or 11
2/7	Discuss readings	What else determines who I am? Read 14, 15, 16, or 17
2/9	Discuss readings	Read handout for film
2/14	Watch film	
2/16	Finish and discuss film	Paper 1 due; Read Plato's "The Myth of the Cave"
2/21	Discuss Plato	What is the nature of reality? Read 11, 12, or 13
2/23	Discuss readings	Read Descartes' "Meditations on the Nature of Knowledge"
2/28	Discuss Descartes	How do we know what we know? Read 2, 4, 5, or 6
3/1	Discuss readings	Study for midterm
3/6	Midterm	Is Knowledge really attainable? Read 11, 13, 14, or 15
3/8	Discuss readings	How do we determine what we ought to do? Read 1, 2, 4, or 5
3/13	Discuss readings	Read Immanuel Kant's "The Good Will and Morality"
3/15	Discuss Kant	What are some reasons for questioning traditional values? Read 8, 11, or 14
3/20+22	Spring Break	
3/27	Discuss readings	Read Virginia Held's "The Ethics of Care"
3/29	Discuss Held	Read film essay
4/3	Watch film	
4/5	Finish and discuss film	Paper 2 due; Read Plato's "Crito"
4/10+12	No Class	

4/17	Discuss Plato	What is the basis of our obligations to society? Read 2, 4, or 7
4/19	Discuss readings	Where do our obligations to society end? Read 10, 11, or 12
4/24	Discuss readings	Read Henry David Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience"
4/26	Discuss Thoreau	Chapter 6- Religion- Read 3, 8, or 12
5/1		Read essay on film
5/3	Watch film	Paper 3 due
5/8	Finish and discuss film	Study for final
5/10	Final Exam	

Reading Philosophy

The reading of primary philosophical texts can be very demanding. For the most part, the language itself is not difficult; what makes reading philosophy challenging is the fact that philosophers tend to investigate things that most people take for granted. Following are some hints for reading philosophical texts.

- * Read the text before coming to class. Do not rely on my lectures as the sole means of "learning" these texts. It is easier to read the text for yourself than to try to figure out what you think I want you to say about them. What I want is for you yourself to come to an understanding of the text, and to talk intelligently about your interpretation.
- * Think of the text as the author's answer to a question. Your task, as the reader, is to discover what the questions is. If you can do this, the text will become much more clear to you.
- * Assume that this question is an important one. The questions asked by philosophers tend to be so fundamental that they seem simplistic, but is you put aside this prejudice and read the text in good faith, you'll see that this isn't so.
- * Mark your book. Make margin notes, bend pages over, underline, use a highlighter; your book is a tool, not a holy relic. Philosophers make arguments for their positions, so it's not a bad idea to become sensitive to certain words and phrases which characterize argument, and circle them. This will help you to follow the author's line of thought.
- * Once you have discovered the questions that the author is attempting to answer, keep it in mind at all times. Oftentimes (though not always) the author's thesis is to be found early on in the text. Once you have located it, mark it. When you get lost in the argument, come back to this passage and get your bearings.
- * Ask yourself whether this question is really that important to you or anyone's life. Why or why not? In other words, reflect honestly on whether the question is relevant to our present world.
- * When you come across puzzling claims in the text, don't just glide over them; try to figure them out. (eg. Socrates' claim that "it is better to suffer injustice than to commit injustice.") What makes this claim confusing? Does it conflict with your beliefs? Does it clash with what you think most people believe?
- * Examine the author's approach (the "answer") to the question. Can you pick out any patterns, any guiding principles? Is the author faithful to these principles throughout the work, or does s/he stray from them? Can you find any contradictions, any inconsistencies? Could the author have offered a better answer to the question? If so, in what way?

Grading Rubric for Writing

Plus = area of strength; *check* = satisfactory **writing** in this area; *minus* = need for improvement in this area.

COLLEGE PORTFOLIO CRITERIA:

___ **Fluid, clear expression**-Ideas are expressed in a style that promotes ease of reading and clear communication of ideas.

___ **Organization** - Paper is structured logically to include: (a) an introduction with a clear statement of the central idea (e.g., purpose, position, problem, or thesis of the paper) as well as an explanation of how the paper is organized; (b) topic sentences for each paragraph that introduce supporting ideas; (c) clear transitions between paragraphs that link all the ideas; (d) a concluding paragraph that revisits your thesis and answers the question: So what?

___ **Elaboration and support** - Ideas are developed with adequate definition of terms as well as supporting details that include properly cited references, preferably to scholarly material related to the topic of the paper.

___ **Research technique and academic integrity** - Sources are cited properly through the application of a standard documentation style assigned by the instructor (in the humanities, MLA is the accepted style). Plagiarism is grounds for a failing grade and will be reported as per College guidelines.

___ **Critical thinking** - Ideas are *analyzed* (by comparing, contrasting and/or challenging them), *evaluated* (by exploring the adequacy of assumptions and taking a position on them), and *synthesized* (by connecting them to other information or by summarizing and integrating them into a concluding statement).

___ **Diction and effective use of language** – College-level vocabulary and correct spelling and word choice are used.

___ **Mechanics and usage** - Correct capitalization, punctuation, verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and use of possessives are evidenced. There are no fragmented and/or run-on sentences.

GRADE:

___ **A** Outstanding paper. It contains thought provoking insights and conclusions and demonstrates clear thinking. The paper is extremely well-written and edited.

___ **B** Good paper. It exceeds the criteria in a way that indicates a clear grasp of the topic(s) beyond merely summarizing information given. The paper is generally well written and focused.

___ **C** Average paper. It meets the criteria of the assignment. The paper may be improved with additional focus and/or editing. (Individual instructors have their own policies about accepting re-writes.)

___ **D** Below average paper. It is missing one of the more of the criteria. The paper requires additional focus and/or editing.

___ **F** Failed to meet the criteria of the assignment. (E.g. did not follow instructions, plagiarized, submitted paper late, other : _____).