Introduction to Philosophy

REL 420 / Spring 2016

Phillips Exeter Academy

Instructor: Mr. Prescott

Academy Building, Latin Study

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Course Description

What is really real? How do I know what I know? Do I have free will? What is the good? These are other speculative questions have troubled the western mind for millennia. This course follows a topical approach to the history of Western philosophy on such issues as metaphysics, epistemology, the problem of evil, the philosophical roots of ethics, and political philosophy. Students will read from the works of ancient and modern writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, Hume, Bentham, and Locke to assist them in coming to their own understanding of these topics. Students will discover what philosophy is and how philosophers question and reason.

Course Requirements, Evaluation, and Policies

**I. Required Text(s):** No required texts; readings will be distributed in class

**II. Evaluation**

**i. Classroom Preparation/Participation (40%) –** Students must thoroughly complete daily assigned reading and/or writing, and demonstrate command of the material by actively and effectively participating in Harkness discussion. Regular attendance is essential in order to succeed in the course.

**ii. Short Essays (60%) –** Students will be assigned a number of short essays (1-2 pages in length) over the course of the term.

**III. Late Work Policy –** Due to the fact that a large number of our Harkness discussions will be contingent upon short writing assignments, I hold a very strict policy on late work in this course. Indeed, I expect your written work to be a product of your own direct engagement with the assigned texts, which cannot be the case if you are completing the assignment after we have discussed it in class. With that in mind, please note that **any essay or assignment that is handed in late will receive no more than half credit.** If you have a scheduling conflict, it is essential that you speak to me in advance to make appropriate accommodations. Doing so after the fact is not acceptable, barring extreme circumstances.

**IV. Religious Observances –** Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with participation in the course, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

**V. Disabilities –** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see me as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs. All discussions will remain confidential, though I may consult Student Health Services to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

**VI. Illness –** As noted above under Classroom Preparation/Participation, regular attendance is essential if one is to succeed in this course. However, I recognize that illness is an unavoidable part of any academic year. If you will not be able to attend class due to illness, **it is the student’s responsibility** to e-mail me so that appropriate plans can be made to make up missed work. In the event that an assignment is due on the day a student is sick (with an excused absence from the Health Center), said assignment will be due at the beginning of the next class meeting.

**Unit 1: Introduction to Philosophy**

**Tuesday, March 22 – Course Introduction/Overview**

* No assigned readings

**Thursday, March 24 – Defining Virtue: Plato and *Meno***

* Read: Plato, *Meno*, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

**Friday, March 25 – Are We Taught?: Instruction vs. Recollection**

* Read: Plato, *Meno*, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

**Unit 2: Metaphysics and Epistemology**

**Monday, March 28 – The Allegory of the Cave**

* Read: Plato, *The Republic*, VII.514A-521B.

**Wednesday, March 30 – The Divided Line**

* Read: Plato, *The Republic*, VI.509D-511E.
* Due: Short Paper

**Thursday, March 31 – Plato, Idealism, and Empiricism**

* Read: Elmer Sprague, *What Is Philosophy?: A Short Introduction*, pp. 30-52.

**Friday, April 1 – Richard Taylor and Empiricism**

* Read: Richard Taylor, “Reality Consists of Matter,” in *Classical Philosophical Questions*, ed. James A. Gould, pp. 349-363.

**Tuesday, April 5 – George Berkeley and Idealism**

* Read: George Berkeley, “Of the Principles of Human Knowledge,” in *Classical Philosophical Questions*, ed. James A. Gould, pp. 121-127.

**Thursday, April 7 – John Locke and Personhood**

* Read: John Locke, “Person, Man, and Substance,” in *About Philosophy*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, pp. 18-27.

**Friday, April 8 – Of What Can I Be 100% Certain?**

* Due: Short Paper

**Monday, April 11 – René Descartes and Cogito Ergo Sum**

* Read: René Descartes, “The Nature of the Mind” and “What Can I Know with Certainty?” in *About Philosophy*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, pp. 9-17, 264-269.

**Wednesday, April 13 – Descartes and Certainty**

* Due: Short Paper

**Thursday, April 14 – Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason**

* Read: Immanuel Kant, “Introduction,” *Critique of Pure Reason*, #1-7.

**Friday, April 15 – Kant, Knowledge, and Experience**

* Due: Short Paper

**Tuesday, April 19 – The Noumenal and the Phenomenal**

* Read: Immanuel Kant, “The Ground of the Distinction of all Objects into Phenomena and Noumena,” *Critique of Pure Reason*.

**Unit 3: Free Will and Determinism**

**Thursday, April 21 – Free Will and Responsibility**

* Read: Baron d’Holbach, “Man is a Being Purely Physical,” in *About Philosophy*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, pp. 95-101.

**Friday, April 22 – David Hume and Compatibilism**

* Read: David Hume, “Of Liberty and Necessity,” in *About Philosophy*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, pp. 110-117.

**Saturday, April 23 – Class Will Not Meet**

* Mr. Prescott away at Hunt Relays (Deerfield Academy)

**Monday, April 25 – When is a Man Responsible?**

* Read: Moritz Schlick, “When is a Man Responsible,” and C.A. Campbell, “Is ‘Free Will’ a Pseudo-Problem?” in *About Philosophy*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, pp. 130-149.

**Wednesday, April 27 – Climate Action Day (No Class)**

**Thursday, April 28 - B.F. Skinner and Behaviorism**

* Read: Ken Heyman, “Skinner’s Utopia: Panacea, or Path to Hell?,” *TIME* (September 20, 1971), pp. 47-53.

**Friday, April 29 – Sartre and the Affirmation of Free Will**

* Read: John-Paul Sartre, “The Humanism of Existentialism,” in *Philosophy: A Literary and Conceptual Approach*, ed. Burton F. Porter, pp. 481-491.

**Tuesday, May 3 – METIC/Matthew 4: The Temptation of Jesus**

* Read: Matthew 4

**Unit 4: The Problem of Evil**

**Thursday, May 5 - The Grand Inquisitor: Free Will and Suffering**

* Read: Fedor Dostoevsky, excerpt from *The Brothers Karamazov*, in *Philosophy: A Literary and Conceptual Approach*, ed. Burton F. Porter, pp. 83-99.

**Friday, May 6 – The Grand Inquisitor vs. Jesus**

* Due: Short Paper

**Monday, May 9 – Leibniz: The Best of Worlds?**

* Read: Gottfried W. Leibniz, excerpt from *Discourse on Metaphysics*, in *Philosophy: A Literary and Conceptual Approach*, ed. Burton F. Porter, pp. 144-150.
* Due: Short Paper

**Wednesday, May 11 - Voltaire: Evil as a Reality to be Overcome?**

* Read: Voltaire, excerpt from *Candide*, in *Philosophy: A Literary and Conceptual Approach*, ed. Burton F. Porter, pp. 151-164.
* Read: Lance Morrow, “Evil” *TIME* (June 10, 1991), pp. 40-45.

**Unit 5: Ethics**

**Thursday, May 12 – The Aqedah**

* Read: Genesis 22

**Friday, May 13 - Kierkegaard: Abraham and Absolute Faith**

* Read: Søren Kierkegaard, excerpt from *Fear and Trembling*, in *Philosophic Classics: From Plato to Derrida,* eds. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Arnold Kaufmann, pp. 197-215.

**Tuesday, May 17 – Teleological Ethics: Utilitarianism**

* Read: Robert Paul Wolff, “Introduction,” in *About Philosophy*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, pp. 331-337.
* Read: Jeremy Bentham, “The Principle of Utility,” in *About Philosophy*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, pp. 338-345.
* Read: Norman E. Bowie and Robert L. Simon, “Some Problems with Utilitarianism,” in *Reason at Work: Introductory Readings in Philosophy*, eds. Stephen M. Kahan, Patricia Kitcher, and George Sher, pp. 81-84.

**Thursday, May 19 – Deontological Ethics: The Categorical Imperative**

* Read: Immanuel Kant, excerpt from *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 85-104.

**Unit 6: Political Philosophy**

**Friday, May 20 – Hegel: The Master and Slave Dialectic**

* Read: G.W.F. Hegel, “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Relations of Master and Servant,” from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in *From Plato to Derrida*, eds. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Arnold Kaufmann, pp. 895-903.

**Monday, May 23 – Marx & Engels: Economic Determinism**

* Read: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Communist Manifesto,” in *Philosophy: A Literary and Conceptual Approach*, ed. Burton F. Porter, pp. 248-257.

**Wednesday, May 25 – Hobbes: The Leviathan**

* Read: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 26-42.

**Thursday, May 26 – Philosophy In Action**

* Due: Short Paper

**Friday, May 27 – Release Time**

* Class Will Not Meet