



The word “philosophy” means “love of wisdom,” and in this course we will be studying the work of people who sought wisdom about many different things. We will encounter both classic and contemporary texts as we explore some of the most interesting, troubling, and maybe even amusing philosophical questions that might be asked, and the sometimes surprising answers to which various thinkers have been led. Through our readings we will be attempting to understand the problems that each author is addressing, the conclusions at which she/he arrives, and the ways in which she/he is positioned in relation to others.

Course Objectives

The over-arching objective of this course is to expose you to a wide variety of philosophical perspectives that can be found primarily in the Western intellectual tradition (though this is not the only tradition we will encounter). We will focus on a number of philosophical topics and look at various, sometimes divergent, viewpoints on these subjects. We will start by asking about the value of philosophical questioning, and then move on to more specific topics in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics and ethics. These include, but are not limited to: What sorts of things are real? What is the nature of the “self”? Is there such a thing as human freedom? What is love? Does life have a meaning, and if so, what is it? Our goal in asking these questions is not necessarily to answer them conclusively, but rather to get a feel for how to approach them in a careful and considerate manner.

Before you begin with all of this, however, you should understand that college education is more than technical training or memorizing information; it is a process of developing your intellectual abilities and mental talents. The study of philosophy not only emphasizes the skills of careful reading, critical thinking, and effective writing and speaking, but also the less tangible skills of understanding the views of others, looking at difficult problems from multiple perspectives, the tolerance of new ideas, and the ability to defend your own. Because philosophy is particularly good at helping you develop these skills, it satisfies the Humanities component of the university’s General Education Program, which targets the following objectives:

- Reading closely, thinking critically, and writing effectively about texts that reflect on perennial questions concerning the human condition.
- Investigating and thoughtfully responding to a variety of ideas, beliefs or values held by persons in situations other than your own.

Course Requirements

Quizzes

I will give unannounced quizzes frequently. These will be graded on a five-point scale and will deal directly with the daily readings. As long as you have read, you should be able to do fairly well on quizzes even if you have not fully understood the reading. Since these are unannounced, please do not ask prior to a class if there will be a quiz, since this, in effect, would be cheating. Missed quizzes cannot be made up, although I will drop your lowest score. These will count collectively for 20% of your grade.

Quizzes will be graded on the following 5-point scale: 5=excellent/all information is correct and answer is detailed; 4=very good/information is correct but detail is somewhat thin; 3= good/information is mostly correct but not detailed or overly vague; 2=poor/information is mostly incorrect and there is little or no detail; 1=very poor/information is almost entirely incorrect and there is no detail; 0=complete failure.

Papers

There will be two paper assignments. The first of these will be due around the midterm, and the second is due on the date and time of the final. These papers should be 600-800 words (2 pages) and are each worth 20% of your final grade. Altogether, then, papers are worth a total of 40% of your final grade.

These assignments will be accompanied by in-class paper writing sessions, and participation in these sessions is mandatory. Failure to attend a scheduled session will result in a drop of one letter-grade for that assignment.

Tests

There will be two take-home tests given during the semester, and they will include short-answer and essay questions. Each test is worth 15% of your final grade. Combined, therefore, tests are worth a total of 30% of your final grade.

Music or Poetry Report

For one short paper you will be asked to find a song or poem that corresponds to a theme we have covered in the course. This will require you to provide the lyrics of the song or the contents of the poem, as well as your analysis of the relation it bears to the philosophical ideas. This should be approximately 400 words (1+ pages) and will count for 5% of the final grade.

Class Participation

Beyond the obvious active participation in class discussions, class participation includes showing up to class on time, having the proper books at hand, and being attentive. Your participation counts for 5% of your grade, and will be graded according to the following scale: 5=exceptional, 4=very good/above average, 3=average, 2=below average, 1=very poor, 0=failure to meet even the most minimal standards of participation.

Missed/Late Work

Missed work sometimes can be made up on the condition that you either inform me beforehand of an upcoming absence or provide me with a formal written excuse. Late work might be accepted, but it may be penalized accordingly.

Attendance

I will take attendance regularly and will know of absences due to missed quizzes, etc. Excessive absences will be factored into your class participation grade and will almost certainly hurt your quiz grade. In addition, anyone who misses more than the equivalent of three weeks of class will automatically receive an F for the course. The reason for this is that your role in a philosophy class is not simply to receive information passively; it is to contribute actively to the classroom environment, and this cannot happen if you miss between 20 and 25% of the class meetings.

Academic Integrity Policy

I adhere to a strict policy on academic integrity (cheating, plagiarism, etc.). Any questions that you may have regarding academic integrity should be resolved before you turn course materials in to me. Information can be found in UWSP Chapter 14, available at: "<http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs/rights/rightsChap14.pdf>". The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. In addition, all infractions will be reported to the university.

Class Conduct

While you are in class, my expectation is that you will conduct yourself appropriately. This includes being generally *attentive*, and having *cell phones turned off* and *put away*. There is nothing appropriate to this course about texting friends, going over materials from other classes, or sleeping, and if you are

doing any of these things, I will ask you to leave the room for the remainder of the class period (that is, if you are asked to leave, you should not return until the next class period, since coming back into the room only creates a further disruption).

E-mail Notice

When you send me e-mail informing me of upcoming absences, I typically save the message without initially replying to it. I review my e-mails after class meetings, and reply to them at that point, so that I can inform you of anything unusual that may have gone on in class, share ppt.s (which are often being developed or adjusted just prior to class meetings), etc. This way you receive the most accurate information I can provide, even though you may not receive an immediate reply to your message.

Grading

Unless stated otherwise, all work will be graded according to the following scale:

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|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 93-100 = A | 90-92.9 = A- | 87-89.9 = B+ | 83-86.9 = B | 80-82.9 = B- | 77-79.9 = C+ |
| 73-76.9 = C | 70-72.9 = C- | 67-69.9 = D+ | 60-66.9 = D | below 60 = F | |

Please be aware that while I am happy to discuss with you any questions you may have about the grades you receive, grades are not “negotiable” in the sense that you can simply request to have a higher grade, or request to do extra work, just to receive the grade you would prefer to receive. If you want to receive higher grades, you should put in the additional effort *before* submitting your work, such that your grade is the highest possible the first time you receive it.

Texts

Text Rental: *Classic Philosophical Questions*, ed. Robert Mulvaney (14th edition).

Reserve Materials

Some readings will be on electronic reserve, which is accessible through D2L. These are marked as “[reserve]” in the reading list. It is your responsibility to be aware of what is being read and to have work completed on time.

General Degree Requirements

This course satisfies the Humanities component of the university’s general education program.

Other Information

Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible. Religious beliefs will be accommodated according to UWS 22.03 provided that you have notified me of any possible conflicts with the class.

Personal Information

Office Hours – Monday and Wednesday 11-12:15 a.m.; Tuesday and Thursday 12-1:50 p.m. Other days and times by appointment.

Office Location – Collins Classroom Center (CCC) #416

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