

PHILOSOPHY AND ITS ISSUES

PHL 100-211/213

Winter 2003

Instructor: R. Valgenti

Office hours: T/Th 10:30-11:30

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

How and why does one begin to philosophize? Appropriate to an introductory course in Philosophy, such a question should help to guide us in understanding what Philosophy is, why Philosophy emerges as a response to myth, and what the goals of Philosophy might be. This course is not, however, a survey of philosophers and their ideas from the beginning of Philosophy through the present. I am more interested in addressing how the major issues – life, death, self-knowledge, society – lead us to philosophize or even to reject philosophy. In this pursuit, we will read closely works by three giants of Philosophy: Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. We will begin our inquiry, however, with a work of mythology that not only predates the rise of Philosophy in the West by 2000 years, but perhaps more effectively than all philosophical attempts, leads us to think deeply about “the big questions” of life, death, self-knowledge, and society. Our task, during our ten weeks together, will be to assess how Philosophy attempts to answer these big questions.

But how might we focus our efforts in this course? Certainly, in a mere ten weeks, we cannot expect to answer all of these questions -- after 2500 years, Philosophy itself has yet to settle on an answer. Like the great philosopher Socrates, perhaps we can take our cue from the Delphic Oracle, the center of prophecy in ancient Greece. While the oracle's purpose was to provide pilgrims with knowledge about the future, engraved upon the threshold of the temple was a sobering reminder to "Know Thyself." To what extent can we have knowledge of who we are, and how might a lack of knowledge about ourselves distort our knowledge of the things we see around us? To acknowledge the power of this question is perhaps the first and most profound step in our philosophical journey.

With these concerns in mind, our more practical tasks in this course will be to:

- learn to read a philosophical text closely for ideas, themes, and arguments
- learn to write about philosophy using coherent and sound argumentation
- engage in philosophical discussion, which requires us to listen respectfully to the ideas of others and formulate our own positions carefully and rationally
- dedicate ourselves to the quest for knowledge and wisdom that defines the philosophical tradition

REQUIRED TEXTS

The Epic of Gilgamesh. An English version with an introduction by N.K. Sandars. New York: Penguin Books, 1972. [ISBN 014044100X]

Plato. *Five Dialogues*. Translated by G.M.A Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983. [ISBN 0915145227]

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The First and Second Discourses*. Translated by Roger D. and Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964. [ISBN 0312694407]

Nietzsche, Friedrich W. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Translated by P. Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 1980. [ISBN 0915144948]

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Readings:

You are expected to read closely and thoroughly all of the required texts listed above according to the schedule of readings. Given the nature of these texts, give yourself time to read them carefully, read them a second time, take notes, and prepare questions in preparation for class, writing assignments, and quizzes. I will supplement the required readings with shorter handouts and some suggestions for further reading – I will announce these in class and post them on the blackboard site as needed.

Quizzes (20%):

During the ten week course, there will be five quizzes, each worth 5% of your grade. I will drop your lowest quiz grade. The quizzes will occur every other Thursday, beginning during the second week, and will cover the material discussed during the previous classes. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, and cannot be made up during the class period or at a later date.

Short writing assignments (40%):

These 2-3 page assignments are intended to help jump-start discussions in class and get you thinking about your major essay topics. They should be 400-800 words in length, typed double-spaced. While they are short assignments, I nonetheless expect you to polish your writing and be mindful of grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Failure to do so will result in a lower grade. There will be 4 of these assignments, each worth 10% of your grade. All of these writing assignments are due at the beginning of class, as they will often be used to spark classroom discussion. If you cannot make it to class on the due date, you must submit the paper to the on-line drop box before the start of class. Late assignments will be accepted, but they will lose a grade for each day that they are late.

Final Essay (20%):

There will be one major essay (approx. 1500 words) due at the end of the course. This is **not** a research paper that will require secondary sources; rather, it will be a thoughtful reflection and/or analysis of the class readings and your completed short writing assignments. I will provide a list of possible topics and a more detailed description of each assignment two weeks before the due date of the essay. The final essay is worth 20% of your grade. Late papers will lose a letter grade for every day that they are late. Not completing the final essay will result in a failure for the course.

Attendance and Participation (20%):

Class participation is extremely important in this course, as it will be the most consistent way for you to practice formulating your ideas in a way that is philosophically rigorous and sound, and the most immediate way for me to assess how well you are comprehending the texts and articulating your thoughts. Class participation does not mean attending every class, sitting attentively, reading the required texts, and being respectful towards the thoughts and ideas of your classmates – those behaviors are minimal expectations! Your class participation goes above and beyond those basic standards, and will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

“A” = active and consistent participation; both questions and responses demonstrate a prepared knowledge of the texts; able to build upon responses and comments of other students and further classroom discussion.

“B” = same as above, but with less frequency **or** with a less prepared familiarity with the readings.

“C” = same as above, with **both** less frequency **and also** a less prepared familiarity with the readings.

“D” = asks pertinent questions, but unfamiliar with the texts; only sporadic participation in discussions.

“F” = unprepared on a regular basis; unable or unwilling to participate in discussions.

On-line Blackboard:

I use the on-line blackboard as a supplement to the time we spend in class and as a place for you to submit an electronic copy of your written work. There you will find updates to the class schedule, assignments, study questions to help you with reading, some of my reflections on classroom discussions, and links to other information that will hopefully help you succeed in this course. I recommend that you check the site often, especially if you have missed a class session. The updated version of Blackboard automatically signs you up, so you no longer have to “enroll” for the course. To log-on, go to <http://blackboard.depaul.edu>

Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism, cheating, and any other violations of DePaul University’s academic integrity policy will not be tolerated. If you are caught, you will fail the course. Be informed: I will utilize the "Turn-it-in" service in cases where I suspect plagiarism. Copies of the Academic Integrity Policy can be found on the Faculty Council web page at <http://pres.depaul.edu/faccouncil/pdf/acadIntegrity.pdf>

Cell phones, pagers, etc.

Don't even dream about having one turned on in my class. If you leave the room to take a call, please do not return.

Final Grade:

Each quiz is worth 5% of your final grade. I will drop the lowest of those grades. Each short writing assignment is worth 10% of your grade. Class participation is worth 20% of your grade. There will also be a final essay worth 20% of your grade, due on the last day of class.

		77-79	C+
93-100	A	73-76	C
90-92	A-	70-72	C-
87-89	B+	67-69	D+
83-86	B	60-66	D
80-82	B-	0-59	F

[Grades are not rounded. Therefore, an 89.9 is still a “B+”, an 86.9 a “B”, etc.]

Office Hours, etc.

If at any time during the quarter you are in need of extra help, have special learning needs, or just have some questions about the material not covered in class, please come to my office hours. Don't leave questions about reading or essays to the last minute!!!! If you cannot make the time listed at the top of this syllabus, please feel free to set up an appointment with me that is more convenient. The best way to do that is to speak to me before or after class, or to email me with at least two days notice. If you need to contact me, email is best, as I rarely if ever check the voicemail at the extension listed above.

This course meets the requirements for the Philosophical Inquiry Learning Domain.

Tentative Schedule of Readings and Assignments for the Winter Quarter 2003:

All assignments are due on the day that they are listed

T	1/7	First class. Discussion of Syllabus. Read article in class. Introduce <i>Gilgamesh</i> .
Th	1/9	Read <i>Gilgamesh</i> in its entirety
T	1/14	Discussion of <i>Gilgamesh</i> and key philosophical issues.
Th	1/16	Quiz #1
T	1/21	Read “Euthyphro” and “Apology” in <i>Five Dialogues</i> . SWA #1 due.
Th	1/23	Discussion of “Apology”
T	1/28	Discussion of “Apology”
Th	1/30	Quiz #2
T	2/4	Read Rousseau, pp. 78-97. SWA #2 due.
Th	2/6	Discussion
T	2/11	Read Rousseau, pp. 101-158.
Th	2/13	Quiz #3
T	2/18	Read Rousseau, pp. 158-181. SWA#3 Due.
Th	2/20	Discussion
T	2/25	Read Nietzsche, pp. 1-14.
Th	2/27	Quiz #4; Read Nietzsche, pp. 14-22.
T	3/4	SWA#4 Due. Read Nietzsche, pp. 22-43.
Th	3/6	Read Nietzsche, pp. 43-49.
T	3/11	Read Nietzsche, pp. 49-64.
Th	3/13	Quiz #5
M	3/17	Final Essay Due

Writing in Philosophy 100 – A List of Assignments for the Quarter

Short writing assignments:

These 2-3 page assignments are intended to help jump-start discussions in class and get you thinking about your major essay topics. They should be 500-800 words in length, typed double spaced. While they are short assignments, I nonetheless expect you to polish your writing and be mindful of grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Failure to do so will result in a lower grade. There will be 4 of these assignments, each worth 10% of your grade. All of these writing assignments are due at the beginning of class, as they will often be used to spark classroom discussion. If you cannot make it to class on the due date, you must submit the paper to the on-line drop box before the start of class. *Late assignments will not be accepted* and will receive a score of zero.

SWA#1 – According to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, what are the limits of human life, and how might they be challenged and/or overcome?

SWA#2 – According to the teachings of Socrates, what value (if any) is given to *human wisdom*?

SWA#3 – Is society beneficial or destructive to human nature? [passage analysis]

SWA#4 – According to Nietzsche's argument, define *life*, and specifically, *human life*.

Sample Essay Assignment:

Short writing assignment #3 -- Passage analysis from Rousseau's "Second Discourse"

This assignment begins with a class period spent working in groups to debate satisfactory and unsatisfactory definitions of human nature. From these group discussions, individual students take a position and then analyze a passage from the "second discourse."

1. Define human nature:
2. Do you believe that society is beneficial or destructive to human nature? _____
3. According to your definition of human nature (1) and your thesis (2), analyze the following quote as if it were part of a larger essay. Your response should be a full paragraph with a topic sentence, 2 pages long.

Without uselessly prolonging these details, everyone must see that, since the bonds of servitude are formed only from the mutual dependence of men and the reciprocal needs that unite them, it is impossible to enslave a man without first putting him in the position of being unable to do without another; a situation which, as it did not exist in the state of nature, leaves each man there free of the yoke, and renders vain the law of the stronger ("Second Discourse", p. 140).

Some sample responses for and against Rousseau:

An argument against Rousseau

“Instead of that sublimed maxim of reasoned justice, *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, it inspires all men with this other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect but perhaps more useful than the preceding one: *Do what is good for you with the least possible harm to others*” (133).

Human Nature: humans are defined by their capacity to use reason and their drive to engage in social relations.
Thesis: I will argue that society is beneficial to human nature.

Society is beneficial to human nature because it keeps human reason away from the dangers of isolation and self-interest. Rousseau seems rather fixated on the negative implications of human reason, telling his reader that "Reason engenders vanity and reflection fortifies it; reason turns man back upon himself, it separates him from all that bothers and afflicts him" (132). I agree with Rousseau that this self-imposed isolation is a possible consequence of reasoning; but, such a consequence is only possible for the human being determined, contrary to his natural impulses, to stay alone. Reason fortifies the loner's resolve to remain alone; but, the human who is already engaged in social relations, relations forged from the moment of birth in the dependency and cooperation of family life, uses reason to justify and increase his dedication to society, knowing that a self-imposed exile from society would only make life difficult and miserable. Rousseau claims that a more modest version of the "golden rule" informs the human in the state of nature:

Instead of that sublimed maxim of reasoned justice, *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, it inspires all men with this other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect but perhaps more useful than the preceding one: *Do what is good for you with the least possible harm to others* (133).

Rousseau's modified "golden rule" has two major flaws. He is correct to point out that the traditional golden rule requires the use of human reason; but, Rousseau is incorrect when he surmises that such a rule is untenable because it requires too much reasoning. Both versions of the golden rule require reason, for even if we merely want to benefit ourselves "with the least possible harm to others," we can only imagine what would be the least harmful to another being if we were capable of placing ourselves in the place of another -- an act of abstraction only capable through reason. With reason required for both maxims, it becomes clear that the first and original "golden rule" more accurately fits human nature. In the second formulation, societal relations are an afterthought, a secondary consideration; in the first, however, the human being, from the outset, reasons that he/she is a member of a group and imagines that he/she can be on the giving or receiving end of any action. If human nature is societal from the outset, and moreover, defined at first by a social relation of dependence (the care of the mother, family, clan, etc.), then it seems that the first and most natural application of human reason would be to conceptualize how I would like to be treated by those who care for me. If my first actions are merely imitations of my caretakers, then one would hope that those actions would be imitations of care, nurture, and mutual benefit.

An argument in favor of Rousseau

“Instead of that sublimed maxim of reasoned justice, *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, it inspires all men with this other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect but perhaps more useful than the preceding one: *Do what is good for you with the least possible harm to others*” (133).

Human Nature: humans are defined by their drive for self-preservation and their capacity for pity/compassion

Thesis: I will argue that society destroys and distorts human nature.

Human nature is damaged when humans, for the supposed benefit of society, place themselves in relationships of dependence. Dependency is the first form of social relation and, unfortunately, characterizes all subsequent social relations that need not necessarily be relations of dependency. While it is perhaps natural for an infant to depend upon its caretaker, societal relations based upon choice and the free association of autonomous individuals answers to the higher demand of freedom...(continue from here)

Philosophy and its Issues: Final Essay

Length: 1500-2000 words, typed, double-spaced

Required Texts: At least one from the first half of class (*Gilgamesh*, “Apology”, “Phaedo”) and one from the second half of class (*Second Discourse*, “On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History...”).

Due Date:

The Topics (choose one):

1. **What is human wisdom?** What do Rousseau and Nietzsche believe it means to live in the best possible manner, and how is this ability to live undermined by modern society? Do you agree with their assessments? Write an essay that analyzes the response of one modern thinker to the limits placed upon human beings by modern society (for example, the limits of inequalities for Rousseau, and the “historical malady” for Nietzsche), and then defend your own position concerning this aspect of human wisdom -- do you agree with one, both, neither? Include a discussion of Socrates here, remembering that Socrates' way of life was also, on some levels, a rebellion against the norms of Athenian society.

2. **Is society beneficial or destructive to human nature?** This is a huge question, one that you will need to limit to the discussion of the texts we have read in class. In so doing, you should consider Rousseau's man in the state of nature, as well as the differences between humans and animals that Nietzsche develops in the early sections of his essay. You might think of this essay as a response to the question we explored in class and in the last short writing assignment. Success for this essay will be measured by your ability to find a point of contention or argument that will hold for both Rousseau's and Nietzsche's text. You might begin, however, with the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and an examination of Enkidu -- was he animal, and then man, or does his growth and transformation symbolize the dual animal/human nature in all of us. In the end, are humans more animal than we think we are, or have we completely lost what we once had?

3. **Does philosophy offer a cure for what ails us?** Nietzsche's proclamation that we suffer from a “historical malady” is the starting point for this essay. In Rousseau and Nietzsche, philosophy is a way to examine and perhaps even transform the “wrongs” of a particular age. As we saw all the way back with Socrates, philosophers are often out of step with their current age, “untimely” as Nietzsche describes his own meditation. In this essay, consider the double-edged sword that is reason and philosophy. While both Rousseau and Nietzsche use philosophy to critique their own ages, they both also realize that reason (for Rousseau) and science (for Nietzsche) are partially if not entirely to blame for current problems. Will this “cure” also make us sick in the process? How effective might philosophy be, in the end, as a tool for diagnosing and curing the ills of a society?

The Essay

A philosophy paper utilizes rational arguments and textual evidence to support a thesis. This paper will allow you to incorporate and challenge the arguments of philosophers we have read in class as you work towards formulating your own response to themes explored by Rousseau and Nietzsche. Your foremost concern should be to answer the topic question you have selected in as clear, concise, and logical a way as possible. Your performance on this assignment will be assessed according to your ability to demonstrate a deep understanding of the texts we have read, as well as your capacity for sound, logical reasoning. Furthermore, since the way we utilize language is integral to the practice of philosophy, I expect that before submitting your paper you will carefully proofread your work to make sure it conforms to the standard rules of English grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Failure to do so will result in a lower grade.

Since this essay counts as your final assessment for the course, I expect that this essay will clearly demonstrate to me what you have learned in the course and how well you write about the texts we have been reading and the ideas we have discussed in class. The best essays for this assignment will support the thesis with a series of arguments based on ideas from the texts and your own rational investigations of your essay's theme. While the primary focus of the essay is your discussion of Rousseau and Nietzsche, your conclusion should open your topic and argument up to the texts we have studied in the entire course. How might your argument apply to Gilgamesh and Socrates? The conclusion of your essay is your chance to really show me that you can pull together and explain all of the themes we have explored (the final class will be my attempt to string together all of the themes we have discussed in this course).

Some specific concerns:

1. The printed copy of your essay is due at 12 noon, Monday August 25. I require that you turn in a printed copy and also submit a copy of your paper to the "drop-box" on the course blackboard. Only in emergency situations should I receive a "drop-box" file without a printed copy -- I can't be expected to print out everyone's paper! Papers arriving after noon will be considered late and penalized accordingly.
2. Please indicate, at the top of your essay, which topic you are answering.
3. Your paper is not complete if it does not have a title!
4. When citing the texts we utilized in class, it is not necessary to use footnotes or endnotes. Instead, show the source by means of a parenthetical reference and the end of the quote or paraphrased passage. This is essential, and papers without citations will be penalized.
5. Be careful with your language. Avoid saying "feel" (e.g. "Socrates feels that the unexamined life is not worth living") when you mean "**think**." One "feels" sensations or emotions. In this course, we are concerned primarily with matters of thought rather than feeling. Appropriate synonyms for "think" (depending on the specific context) include: believe, hold, say, assert, claim, argue, contend, maintain, imply, infer, suggest, demonstrate, reply, respond, teach, etc. This usage is especially important when you are developing your own philosophical argument -- be very careful with the language you use.
6. Make this your best work of the quarter. The paper is worth 30% of your grade, so spend the appropriate amount of time on this final essay!

Philosophy and its Issues: Final Essay Format and Grading Rubric

Be sure that you have:

- ___ typed the paper double-spaced in 12 point font
- ___ placed your name, the class, my name, and the assignment in the upper left corner of your first page
- ___ given your essay a title
- ___ numbered all pages
- ___ utilized the adequate number of texts in your discussion
- ___ properly cited all quotations and references
- ___ stapled your pages together and given me a printed copy in class
- ___ submitted a copy of your paper to the "drop box" for my on-line blackboard course

An "A" paper, without exception:

- a. presents a well-written, clear, coherent, and consistent argument in an organized essay format
- b. begins with a brief and focused introduction that ends in a strong thesis statement
- c. demonstrates not only a familiarity with the content of the texts read in class, but uses arguments from those texts to support and/or provide a counterpoint for the essay's thesis
- d. does not stray from the thesis of the paper, but builds upon it progressively and convincingly
- e. does not suffer from any major lapses in logic, and identifies logical ambiguities when present
- f. ends with a conclusion that incorporates ideas from one of the earlier texts discussed in class
- g. has few (< 2 per page) or no errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- h. meets the requirements of the checklist above

A "B" paper does all of the above, but suffers from up to three of the following flaws:

- a. less convincing in its argument than the "A" because of a lapse in the paper's organization or coherence
- b. begins with an introduction that lays out only general parameters for discussion or that lacks a strong thesis
- c. demonstrates a general conceptual understanding of the texts read in class, but lacks the specificity of the "A" paper and the ability to clearly analyze the relevance of the text to the paper's argument
- d. strays at points from the paper's thesis, or sometimes loses the argument's guiding idea
- e. suffers from minor lapses in logic, but nothing so grave as to jeopardize the paper's overall coherence
- f. has a conclusion, but one that only restates the basic argument of the paper or makes brief mention of another text
- g. has 2-5 errors per page
- h. missing 2-4 of the checklist items above

A "C" paper suffers from more than three of the above flaws and/or one of the following conditions:

- a. lacks argumentative coherence and/or does not make clear connection between the textual content and your thesis
- b. does not have a clear thesis statement
- c. demonstrates a poor and incomplete knowledge of the texts read in class
- d. relies more on opinion and unsupported claims than argumentation and logic to support the essay's thesis
- e. has more than 5 *major* errors per page

A "D" paper has 2-3 or more of the above conditions for a "C" paper

An "F" paper does not meet the above conditions and/or basic requirements of this assignment.

Please take note: papers will lose one full grade for every day they are late. Plagiarism will result in a "zero" for the assignment and possible failure for the course.