

# Introduction to Philosophy

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Meeting Time: Wed/Fri 12:00pm-1:15pm Classroom Building 241

This course will explore many of the perennial questions of philosophy, including what ethical obligations we owe to other people, the existence of God, the nature of love, the meaning of life, and how society should be organized politically. To that end, we will read classic and contemporary sources and along the way work to develop argumentative and analytical skills. We will also briefly examine contemporary debates concerning political philosophy, physician-assisted suicide, race, and sexual orientation. This seminar course will emphasize discussion and respectful argumentation. Assessment will consist of two short papers of 5-10pgs each, weekly two-paragraph response papers to readings, podcast reflections, and participation. There will be no exams.

*Office Hours:* After class or by appointment.

*Meetings:* Students will be expected to have carefully read the assigned readings **prior** to class time. As a seminar course, discussion is vital for successful learning and students will be expected to participate. I may call on students to answer specific questions.

*Readings:*

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays* (Oxford World's Classics) ISBN: 0199670803

Plato, *Symposium* (Hackett Classics) ISBN 0872200760

All other readings will be made available via Coursepack and on Sakai.

## **Assessment**

*Weekly response papers (25% of grade):* Students should submit a two-paragraph response to one of the readings each week. These will be due by Friday at noon and will be submitted through the Assignments tab in Sakai, in Word doc format. The first paragraph should summarize the *main* argument from the text, including the conclusion as well as the premises used to arrive there. The second paragraph is evaluative and should defend or criticize at least one argument from the text. This can be the main argument or a side point.

*Short Papers (25% of grade each):* There will be two short papers due later in the semester via the Assignments tab in Sakai, in Word doc format, the first on Feb 27th

**\*Note: This syllabus may be revised in the course of the semester.\***

and the second by April 24th, both by 11:59pm. These papers should be 5-10 pages double spaced, with Times New Roman 12-point font with 1-inch margins on the sides. These should (1) explain and (2) defend or criticize a significant argument from one of the texts that we have read. Only 1pg maximum should be devoted to explaining the argument from the reading. Longer is not necessarily better, but instead strength of explanation and argumentative clarity will be the main points of evaluation.

*Participation (20% of grade):* Students must participate in classroom discussions but need not participate each day. Grading will not be based on the number of times a student speaks but instead on general willingness to be involved in the conversations that take place. Attendance is required as a part of your participation grade. Students should be on time and prepared with the (non-electronic) readings for that day.

*Podcast reflection (5% of grade):* Students should listen to four episodes of the Philosophy Bites podcast and write a short reflective paragraph for each one. This will be separated into two assignments, two reflections per assignment. The first set is due Feb 6th and the second set on Mar 27th, by 11:59pm. These should simply describe the topic that was discussed as well as identify an interesting point that was made by the interviewee. There are many episodes to choose from and students can select any four they wish.

## **Policies**

*Late work policy:* Requests for an extension must be made with at least one day's notice before the due date and will be granted at instructor discretion. Late work will be accepted up to 2 days after the due date, with a half letter grade penalty.

*Electronics policy:* Students should bring all assigned readings to class in non-electronic form. Electronics will not be allowed in the classroom unless you either (1) have accommodations that require them, for which you must provide documentation, or (2) make a request to me in person where you argue the case for an electronics allowance in your individual case. All readings will be available to you via printed book or course pack.

*Accommodations:* Any student with a disability or special learning requirement impacting their participation in the course should discuss this with me in the first week of class so that reasonable accommodations can be made.

## **Schedule**

### **Section One: Obligations to Others**

Fri 1/7: Course introduction; what is philosophy?

Wed 1/12: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (Sakai)

Fri 1/14: Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck" (Sakai)

Wed 1/19: Galen Strawson, "Luck Swallows Everything" (Sakai)

Fri 1/21: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* Parts I-II (115-139)

Wed 1/26: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* Part V (155-177)

\*Recommended reading: Bernard Williams, "Consequentialism and Integrity"

## **Section Two: Personal Identity**

Fri 1/28: Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (199-201, 204bottom-209top, 229-233, sakai)

Wed 2/2: Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, Ch.4 (Sakai)

## **Section Three: Love and Beauty**

Fri 2/4: Plato, *Symposium*, pg. 7 (starting at 177b paragraph) – p.39

\*2 podcast reflections due by 11:59pm 2/6\*

Wed 2/9: Plato, *Symposium*, finish (40-77)

Fri 2/11: Robin Dembroff, "What is Sexual Orientation?" (1-9, 12top-21, 24-end; Sakai)

Wed 2/16: Alexander Nehamas, "An Essay on Beauty and Judgment" (Sakai) + Jesse Prinz, "Wonder Works: Renovating Romanticism About Art"

<https://aestheticsforbirds.com/2013/08/05/wonder-works-renovating-romanticism-about-art-jesse-prinz/>

\*Recommended readings: Robin Dembroff and Daniel Wodak "Gendered Language: Why Preserve the Status Quo?" <https://blog.apaonline.org/2018/09/28/gendered-language-why-preserve-the-status-quo/>

Alexander Nehamas, "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" (sakai)

## **Section Four: Philosophy of Religion**

Fri 2/18: Thomas Aquinas "The Five Ways"; William Rowe, "The Cosmological Argument" (24-27, 32-33; Sakai)

Wed 2/23: Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Rebellion" (from *The Brothers Karamazov*, sakai)

Fri 2/25: Alexander Rosenberg and Dan McShea, *Philosophy of Biology* pgs 1-7top, 12-23 mid (sakai)

Wed 3/2: J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Sakai), pgs. 246-264 top paragraph

**\*Short paper 1 due by 11:59pm 2/27\***

\*Recommended reading: William Paley, “Natural Theology” (Sakai) + “Worldview Naturalism in a Nutshell” <https://www.naturalism.org/worldview-naturalism/naturalism-in-a-nutshell>

## **Section Five: Political Philosophy**

Fri 3/4: Xunzi, “Human Nature is Bad” (Sakai) + Robinson Jeffers, “Shine, Perishing Republic” (Sakai)

-----3/5-3/13 Spring Break-----

Wed 3/16: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* Part II (18-41 top paragraph, 51bottom-54)

Fri 3/18: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* Part III (55-72)

Wed 3/23: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* Part IV (73-90)

Fri 3/25: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* Part V (91-105 bottom)

**\*2 podcast reflections due by 11:59pm 3/27\***

Wed 3/30: Juliet Hooker, “Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Politics” (Sakai)

\*Recommended reading: Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (Sakai)

## **Section Six: Medical Ethics**

Fri 4/1: John Donnelly, *Suicide: Right or Wrong?* (Sakai) pgs. 7-14, 26bottom-end.

Wed 4/6: James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” (Sakai) + “Assisted Suicide in the U.S.” (Wiki article, read article but skim state specific information)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assisted\\_suicide\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assisted_suicide_in_the_United_States)

Fri 4/8: Jonathan Glover, “Human Values and Genetic Design” (Sakai, excerpt)

\*Recommended readings: Ronald Dworkin et al., “Assisted Suicide: The Philosopher’s Brief” (Sakai)

## **Section Seven: The Meaning of Life**

Wed 4/13: Rivka Weinberg, "Ultimate Meaning: We Don't Have It, We Can't Get It, and We Should Be Very, Very Sad" (1-13top, 16mid-end; Sakai)

Fri 4/15: Richard Taylor, *Good and Evil*, selection (Sakai)

Wed 4/20: Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship" (Sakai)

\*Recommended reading: Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (Sakai)

***\*Short paper 2 due by 11:59pm 4/24\****