

SYLLABUS
INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY 100 – 006
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
SPRING 2008
M / W 3.00 – 4.15 PM EAST # 122

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Office Hours: By appointment : Robinson A # 407 D

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course will concentrate on presentation of questions and issues discussed by various philosophers. We will focus primarily on ancient philosophy and the ideas and concepts created by the ancient philosophers. The ideas and topics discussed by the first philosophers, sometimes referred to as perennial philosophical questions, shaped the ways of thinking for following generations and cultures. Some of the problems we will cover include: the kinds and validity of knowledge, the controversy between materialism and idealism, the problem of the existence of God, some elements of ethics and morality, social and political philosophy, the concept of natural law, human nature and the problem of freedom.

The aim of this course is to show that philosophy is an art of wondering and that we are all philosophers, to some degree. We keep asking the same questions, which were first posed thousands of years ago. Be aware the many of questions we will discuss have been answered in various, often contradictory ways.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. B. Magee: *The Story of Philosophy*; A Dorling Kindersley Book
2. T.Z. Lavine: *From Socrates to Sartre*; Bantam
3. W. T. Jones: *Classical Mind*; Harcourt...
4. Plato: *Republic* (any edition)

OPTIONAL TEXTS:

1. A Dictionary of Philosophy (any)
2. More will be announced in class

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Students will be expected to read and make an effort to comprehend all assignments. We will be reading and interpreting the original philosophical texts. Please be warned that the reading assignments will often have to be read several times to be fully comprehended. This course will combine the elements of lecture, class discussions, seminar, question and answers as well as students oral presentations.

There will be three in class tests/exams – each worth 25 points. These tests will be a combination of multiple choice, true/false questions and short answer questions based on our readings, class lectures and on understanding of various philosophers along with understanding philosophical terms.

Each student will choose one book from the list provided and write a three to four page book report worth 10 points. (One page is approximately 300 words.) This paper will be due on the last regular class or earlier (it is up to you).

Regular attendance is strongly encouraged. Excessive absences will influence your grade in a negative way. I will check attendance several times per semester. I will randomly select, however, only seven attendance lists and you will get one point for each time your name appears on the list (up to seven points). Please, be on time and do not leave class earlier.

The remaining eight points will be distributed between short take home (up to one page long) projects, in class quizzes and participation in class discussion.

Regardless of the reason of the absence, students are still responsible for submitting any work due on that day. If you miss a class, please arrange with your colleagues for topics and information missed during your absence.

FINAL GRADES:

91 – 100	A
81 - 90	B
71 - 80	C
61 - 70	D
Less than 61	F

Exams:	3 x 25 = 75 points
Book Report:	10 points
Attendance:	7 points
Projects/Participation:	8 points
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	100 Points Total

OBJECTIVES:

Students should:

1. Be familiar with the fundamental philosophical terms and concepts. For example: rationalism, empiricism, irrationalism, skepticism, metaphysics, epistemology, materialism, idealism, philosophical anthropology, induction, deduction
2. Be familiar with the most important philosophical questions and some possible answers/solutions
3. Identify some of the most important philosophers and their philosophical schools. For example: Platonism, Stoicism, Thomism, Cartesianism, Marxism, Existentialism, Pragmatism ...
4. Have a general understanding of the history of philosophy and to be able to place the philosophers in their historical/political context
5. Be able to critically evaluate major philosophical theories and to see their relevance and influence (positive or negative) on the way we think
6. Understand practical application of philosophy and ethics in the contemporary world. For example: politics, economics, and moral issues
7. Appreciate the importance of philosophy as systematic questioning of basic assumptions

COLLEGE POLICIES (and mine):

Smoking, food, and drinks are not permitted in the classroom.

GMU complies with the American with Disabilities Act. If any student needs special accommodations, please speak to me or the campus ADA representative in the Counseling Office.

While in this course, students are expected to display behavior consistent with professional etiquette and accepted common practices of courtesy and respect. Disruption and rudeness will not be tolerated. Please turn off your cellular phones, iPods and other electronic devices.

Plagiarism: All exams must follow the guidelines of the GMU Honor Code. I understand plagiarism as the use of a meaningful ideas/ original authorship from someone else's work without adequate acknowledgement.

Changes in Syllabus and class cancellation: The time table and the list of the topics for each class are tentative. The amount of time we will spend on each topics may vary. Please, be aware that, depending on your questions and our discussions, we will address many philosophical and ethical issues not listed in the syllabus or discussed in your books. Therefore, please, never ask questions " Why are we discussing this material?" or "Is this going to be on the test?" If I have to cancel class, I will notify you. If I am late (traffic), please, wait 20 minutes. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed.

STRUCTURE OF THE CLASS – page numbers refer to reading assignments: M = Magee, L = Lavine, J = Jones,
R = *Republic*

This is a tentative “time – table” . The amount of time we will spend on each topic may vary.

Jan. 23 - 30	Introduction. Branches of Philosophy. L: 1-6, M: 1-19
Feb. 4, 6	Presocratic Philosophy. Metaphysics. L: 23-24, M: 1-19, J: 1-39
Feb. 11, 13	Atomism. Determinism. Freedom. M: 44-45, J: 74-107
Feb. 18, 20	Ethics. Sophists. Moral relativism. Modern implications. M: 40-45, L: 23-27, J: 63-73, R: first book (justice)
Feb. 25, 27	State and individual. Socrates and his trial. (video). L: 9-27, M: 20-23. J: 108-118. Overview for the test
Mar. 3	Exam / Test # 1
Mar. 5, 17, 19	Contemporary modern problems (euthanasia, abortion, social justice, environmental ethics, animal rights) - students do their individual research/projects
Mar. 10, 12	No class. Spring break
Mar. 24, 26	Plato: idealism, rationalism, nativism. L: 20-53, M: 24-31, J:119-142, R: pages to be announced
Mar. 31, Apr 2, 7	Social and political philosophy. Utopia (video) L: 54-65, J: 147-192, R: pages to be announced
Apr. 9, 14, 16,	Nature of reality, realism. Does God exist? (Aristotle). L: 68-76, M: 32-39, J: 214-243 Political theory, ethics, art (Aristotle) (video). J: 255-276, 285-311. Overview for the test
Apr. 21	Exam / Test # 2
Apr. 23 – May 5	Descartes, Machiavelli and modern philosophy. Mind – body problem. L: 77-130, M: 72-73, 83-95 Locke (liberalism), Marx (Marxism). L: 140-143, 261-319, M: 102-108, 164-171
May 12 (Monday) 1.30 PM.	- Final exam / Test # 3

IMPORTANT DATES

Last day to drop without tuition penalty: Feb5

Last day to drop: Feb. 22

Spring break: March 10 – March 16 - no classes

Last regular class: Monday, May 5

Final exam/ Test # 3: Monday, May 12: 1.30 - 4.15 PM.

