

OXFORD COLLEGE
PHILOSOPHY 100: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Ken Anderson
Fall 2009
Office: 401 Seney Hall
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OBJECTIVES:

- To think better
- To read better
- To become acquainted with a few of the fundamental questions in philosophy and methods for addressing those questions
- To recognize the difficulty of understanding our humanity and the nature of human freedom

This is an introductory philosophy course in which students will be introduced to some basic ways of doing philosophy and a few of the important people who have practiced philosophy. During the semester we will consider most of the perennial philosophical questions: Does God exist and, if so, what is the nature of God? Does the world exist and, if so, what is it like? What is it possible to know with certainty? What is the meaning of being human? How can we determine what is right to do? What is the nature of human freedom? Although we will talk about plenty of possible answers to these questions, the class will **never** reach a definitive conclusion to any question. If you require **the** answer, then you are probably in the wrong class.

Although the readings are arranged in chronological order, this is not an historically oriented course. Our approach will be topical. The overriding topic for the semester will be the question of freedom – what freedom means and the role it plays in human existence.

The course will be divided into roughly four parts. The first part will look at the person who started it all, Socrates, who began asking the basic questions of philosophy with which we still struggle. Epictetus will then provide a peculiar interpretation of the Socratic approach. The second part will be a close reading of Descartes' *Meditations*, the foundational text of modernism. The third part will deal with the question of human nature and the possibility of liberation through Rousseau's romantic naturalism and Sartre's existentialism. Finally, we will read Barth's novel, *The End of the Road*. There may be supplemental readings add here or there.

TEXTS: Plato, *Trial and Death of Socrates*
 Epictetus, *The Handbook*
 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*
 Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*
 Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*
 John Barth, *The End of the Road*

REQUIREMENTS:

Three in-class exams – 9/24, 10/22, 11/19

Final exam – 12/10 – 9:00-noon

Approximately six quizzes/brief writings

Class participation

Attendance is mandatory. More than two absences will affect your grade. See reverse for details.

GRADING: Each exam will count approximately 20%, the essays and class participation will each count approximately 10% toward the final grade. I will use +/- grading.

RULES OF BEHAVIOR, ETC.

You may miss **two** classes for **any reason** without penalty. If you miss **more than two** classes, you will be penalized on the following basis:

3rd – 4th absences lose 1.5% from the final grade for each absence

5th – 6th absences lose 3% from the final grade for each absence

7th – 8th absences lose 4.5% from the final grade for each absence

9th -- ? you are in real trouble

Three times late for class will be considered an **absence**. If you are exceptionally late, I will consider it two-thirds of an absence. If you are late, it is your responsibility to remind me after class to mark you as late rather than as absent. Sleeping in class may also be considered as an absence or as a late according to the discretion of the professor. You cannot argue later in the semester that you were not really absent as many times as my records indicate.

These penalties will be in **addition to** and **separate from** the class participation grade.

Of course I recognize that **H1N1/Swine Flu** may be a factor during the semester, so we will adjust our thinking as things play out.

If your **cell phone** goes off during class I will be quite irritated. I am easily distracted, as you will discover quickly. If you **leave** the classroom after class has begun, unless you have a good excuse, I will be quite irritated. I am easily distracted, as you will discover quickly. Of course, exceptions can be made for medical reasons and other situations where you must be in constant communication with someone outside of our room.

No computer use during class. I know students like and are used to the devices, but I have found that they can be deadly to classroom dynamics and that students tend to check email/facebook/whatever during perceived lulls in class. If you absolutely need the thing, you must talk with me for permission.

“Every thinker puts some portion of an apparently stable world in peril and no one can wholly predict what will emerge in its place.” -John Dewey