

PHI250 - 3 credits

PHILOSOPHY AS LITERATURE

time & venue

TBA

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Overview

This course explores fundamental questions about ourselves, society and the world. What makes us happy? What is justice? Is art good or bad? What is reality made of? Does God exist and can we prove it? As you engage with these questions, you will experience philosophy in different literary forms: aphorism; dialogue; poem; and mathematical proof. You will read philosophical texts that belong to these different literary forms and then write your own philosophical aphorism, dialogue, poem and mathematical proof. Philosophy can be pursued in many ways. Hopefully, you'll feel at home in one of them.

Materials

Course materials will include book excerpts, audios and videos, powerpoint slides, handouts and homework assignments.

Course website

All course materials mentioned above will be available on the course website. Please check the website regularly

TBA

COURSE SCHEDULE

week 1

Philosophy can be written in a surprisingly different number of literately forms, as aphorism, dialogue, treatise, journal article, poetry, meditation, confession. Why is that?

PART I - APHORISM

week 2

We will begin by reading excerpts from Lao Tze's *Tao Te Ching*. This book is the foundation of Taoist philosophy, one of the main school of classical Chinese philosophy. Its style is brief and enigmatic. You will read excerpts and try to make sense of them!

week 3

We will read the aphorisms of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, known for the motto *panta rei* (often translated "everything flows"). You will read select fragments of his work. The challenge, once again, will be to make sense of them.

Requirements

There are six reading responses, each worth **5%** of the grade.

There are four assignments, each worth **15%** of the grade.

#1. due __

#2. due __

#3. due __

#4. due __

In-class participation counts for **10%** of the grade.

Late policy

If an assignment is submitted late, you will not get credit for it.

Course objectives

You will exercise and develop:

- ♦ analytical reasoning skills, in particular, the ability to weigh reasons for/against a claim
- ♦ analytical writing skills, in particular, the ability to formulate an argument and defend it from objections
- ♦ ability to write in differ registers and literary forms

week 4

Let's look back. Who is the most enigmatic, Lao Tze or Heraclitus? Who do you think is the wisest? Who would you like to have as a friend? The challenge this week is for you to write your own philosophical aphorisms.

PART 2 - DIALOGUE

week 5

Another way in which philosophy can be written is the dialogue, a reasoned exchange of ideas between two or more characters. We will read *The Republic* by ancient Greek philosopher Plato. This dialogue is an examination of the nature of justice for the individual and in society. We will read *book I* in which the character Thrasymachus argues that justice is whatever benefits the strongest, while Socrates attempts to prove him wrong.

**assignment #1
due**

week 6

If you are interested in *The Republic* you should read on, but the class will turn to novelist, playwright and philosopher Irish Murdoch. We will read her philosophical dialogue *Art and Eros*. This is about art and the passions: what is good and bad art, and whether art is dangerous because it creates illusions and triggers feelings that bring us away from the truth.

week 7

We will look back at the topics we discussed in this part of the course: justice, society and the individual; art, truth and illusion. You should now write your own philosophical dialogue!

PART 3 - POEM

week 8

Philosophy can also be written as poetry. We will read the poem *The Nature of Things* by Ancient Roman philosopher Lucretius. This poem

**assignment #2
due**

Course etiquette

Just in case you forgot:

- ♦ do the reading and come to class ready to participate
- ♦ disagree with me and your fellow students, but always be polite
- ♦ don't be shy and don't think your ideas are not worth sharing
- ♦ when you're in class, don't get distracted by the other world
 - i.e. your phone, Instagram, etc.

No plagiarism!

You may not copy the work of others without proper acknowledgement, and if you do so, you will fail the class.

Disability accommodation

Students who have a disability which may necessitate an academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids and services in a class should contact the *Office of Student Disability Services*.

Tutoring services

The *Academic Center for Excellence (ACE)* is a tutoring center on campus. ACE provides appointment based and drop-in tutoring in the humanities, social sciences, and writing, as well as general writing and academic skills workshops.

articulates an atomistic philosophy, the view that everything in reality is made up of indivisible atoms, including emotions, smells and sounds. We will begin with reading *book I* in which Lucretius explains how indivisible atoms can constitute the whole of reality through their different forms and shapes.

week 9

We will next turn to human psychology, life and death. In *book III*, Lucretius explains why although our soul is mortal, we should not fear death. We will also read excerpts from *book IV* which discusses sexuality and love.

week 10

We will look back at the topics of this part of the course: atoms and reality, fear of death and the nature of love. You should now write your own philosophical poem!

PART 4 - MATHEMATICAL PROOF

week 11

Philosophy can also be written as a mathematical proof. To understand what a proof is like, we will preliminarily familiarize ourselves with Euclid's axiomatic method by reading *book I* of his *Elements*, one of the most important books in geometry.

**assignment #3
due**

week 12

We will next read the *Ethics*, a work by the 17th Jewish-Dutch-Portuguese philosopher Baruch Spinoza. The *Ethics* is a treatise that employs the axiomatic method to establish theorems about the existence of God, the relationship between matter and soul, happiness and the good life. We will read *book I* in which Spinoza gives a mathematical proof of God's existence.

week 13

Spinoza's text is difficult just like it is difficult to understand all the steps in a proof. Is this it difficult to read than interpreting the aphorisms of Lao Tze and Heraclitus?

The challenge this week is for you to write your own mathematical proof.

**assignment #4
due**