

# The Examined Life

## Course Proposal

January 11, 2015

1. **Abbreviated Course Title:** The Examined Life
2. **Full Course Title:** The Examined Life
3. **Credits:** Three (3)
4. **Course Components:** Lecture
5. **Course Level:** 100-level
6. **Catalog Description** This course teaches students to identify and evaluate those beliefs that guide their thoughts and actions. Reflecting on different sources, students identify those philosophical beliefs that play a role in their own lives. By developing their critical thinking skills, they learn how to clarify, systematize, and assess these beliefs.
7. **Course Prerequisites or Co-requisites:** N/A
8. **Rationale:** This course will take the place of the Department of Philosophy and Religion's Persons & Problems course. The primary goal of the course is for students to develop tools to identify, systematize, and evaluate their (often) latent beliefs. These are important tools for our majors and minors, as well as the wider student population, to develop. The former will learn how to identify features of their psychology effecting their judgments of philosophical issues. It will also introduce these students to specific areas of philosophy they may wish to pursue later. The latter will learn 1) how their thoughts and actions are guided by a variety of beliefs that they may not have yet reflected upon, and 2) how to systematize and evaluate these beliefs. These are skills that will be helpful in their own disciplines as well as their own lives.

Students will be asked to reflect on various topics depicted in newspaper articles, artwork, literature, and short philosophical writings. After identifying their intuitions about these topics, they will learn how to draw connections between these intuitions, learn how their various intuitions have logical implications for how they should behave and think, and learn how to evaluate their veracity. By completing the introspection exercises and writing short evaluations of their beliefs in light of the tools and material introduced, they will become clearer and more reflective writers and thinkers. By the end of the course, they will also have moved towards living more reflective lives.

**9. Student Learning Outcomes (SLO):****I. Discipline-specific (DS) Student Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

**DS1** IDENTIFY their latent beliefs about fundamental aspects of life

**DS2** INTERPRET readings ranging from newspaper articles to literary and philosophical texts, as well as artworks and movies

**DS3** DEFINE fundamental philosophical ideas and concepts

**DS4** COMPARE different fundamental beliefs about a range of philosophical topics

**DS5** DEVELOP their own beliefs in a systematic way

**DS6** EVALUATE their own and others' beliefs

**II. University-wide Student Learning Outcomes** (to be included in programmatic assessment activities, i.e. assessed in the signature assignment(s))

**(1) Tier 1 Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Outcomes (T1CTPS)** By the end of the course, students will be able to:

**T1CTPS1** Identify a topic that, while manageable/doable, is too narrowly focused and leaves out relevant aspects of the topic.

**T1CTPS2** State issue/problem to be considered critically, but the description leaves some of the terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/or backgrounds unknown.

**T1CTPS3** Take information from sources with some interpretation evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Take viewpoints of experts mostly as fact, with little questioning.

**T1CTPS4** Question some assumptions. Identify several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).

**T1CTPS5** State a specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) that acknowledges different sides of an issue.

**T1CTPS6** Develop a methodology or theoretical framework that may be incorrectly developed, unfocused, or missing critical elements.

**T1CTPS7** Provide a conclusion that is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion); clearly identify some related outcomes (consequences and implications).

**(2) Tier 1 Written Communication Outcomes (T1WC)** By the end of the course, students will be able to:

**T1WC1** Demonstrate awareness of context, audience, and purpose for writing, and attention to the assigned tasks (e.g. begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).

**T1WC2** Use appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.

**T1WC3** Follow expectations appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation.

**T1WC4** Demonstrate an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.

**T1WC5** Use language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.

#### 10. Instructional Procedures: (SLO adjusted)

1. Discussion (SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)
2. Lectures (SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)
3. Reading Assignments (SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)
4. Listening/Viewing Assignments (SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)
5. Written Assignments (incl. **Signature Assignment**) (SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)
6. Student Presentations (Individual or Group) (SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)

#### 11. Course Content:

- Required textbook: 'Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings' by John Perry, Michael Bratman, & John Martin Fischer
- All other readings circulated online.

##### Week 1: Introduction

1. 'Apology: Defense of Socrates', Plato, p.22
2. *Examined Life* documentary  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)

##### Week 2: Barriers to Reflection

1. 'On the Study of Philosophy', p.3
2. 'Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of "Blind" Auditions on Female Musicians', Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse (online)
3. 'In a Different Voice', Carol Gilligan (online)
4. Assignment: Introspection exercise on student's own perceptive biases  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

##### Week 3: Systematizing Beliefs

1. 'Logical Toolkit', p.9
2. Logic Handout  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)

##### Week 4: Meaning of Life

1. 'Excerpt from *Philosophical Explanations*', Robert Nozick, p.168
2. 'Crimes and Misdemeanors' (movie)
3. 'A Confession', Leo Tolstoy (online)
4. Assignment: Introspection exercise on whether life has meaning

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(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 5:** Continued

1. 'The Absurd', Thomas Nagel, p.755
2. 'The Meaning of Lives', Susan Wolf, p.782  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 6:** What life to live?

1. 'Silas Mariner', selection, George Elliot (online)
2. *Nicomachean Ethics*, selections, Aristotle, p.545
3. Assignment: Introspection exercise on what life they have latently assumed is worth living  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 7:** Cultural Relativism

1. 'Anthropology and the Abnormal', Ruth Benedict (online)
2. 'The Challenge of Cultural Relativism', James Rachels (online)
3. Assignment: Introspection on cultural sensitivity  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 8:** How to behave?

1. Selection from the Patriot Act (online)
2. 'Utilitarianism and Integrity', Bernard Williams, p.487
3. 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas', Ursula LeGuin (online)
4. 'Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (Second Formula of the Categorical Imperative)', Immanuel Kant, p.504
5. Assignment: introspection on the principles by which they live  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 9:** The Problem of Evil

1. Picasso's *Guernica* (painting)
2. 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion', David Hume, p.60
3. Assignment: Reflection on painting and war  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 10:** Arguments for God

1. 'Design for Living', Michael J. Behe (online)
2. 'Intelligent Design Has No Place in the Science Curriculum', Harold Morowitz, Robert Hazen, and James Trefil (online)
3. 'Natural Theology', William Paley, p.47
4. 'Why I am not a Christian', Bertrand Russell, p.56  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 11:** Personal Identity,

1. Star Trek, 'Second Chances', Series 6, Episode 24. (TV episode)
2. 'A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality', John Perry, p.312
3. Assignment: Introspection exercise on what they take their identity to consist in  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 12:** Continued

1. 'Personal Identity', Derek Parfit, p.343  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 13: Student Presentations**

(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 14: Student Presentations**

(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

**Week 15: Review**

1. Signature Assignment Due  
(SLO: DS1-6; T1WC1-5; T1CTPS1-7)

**12. Undergraduate General Education Courses:**

- a. Approval is sought for a 100-level Tier 1 course. Students will have the opportunity to focus on developing their skills in two university-wide student learning outcomes, critical thinking and problem-solving and effective writing skills, as they identify, discuss, and write about their most personally held beliefs. At the same time, the course will introduce them to work in the discipline of philosophy by, again, honing their critical thinking skills, introducing them to the reading and interpretation of theoretical philosophical texts, and to the practice of philosophy through dialog/exchange of ideas.
- b. Approval in Mode 2: Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies is sought. While philosophy as a discipline works in different modes, it is mainly located in the second one, which includes the theoretical inquiry into how to systematize our thinking about ourselves and reality. The course introduces students to the distinction between descriptive and normative judgments; makes them recognize the importance of norms, values, and beliefs in society; and encourages them to critically examine their own ethical beliefs and values and become aware of their hidden assumptions. It studies the status of universal versus relative, culturally determined ethical beliefs and the importance of different values as they determine different ways of acting and being in the world. And it introduces students—in a modest way—to engaging with philosophical arguments and theories by analyzing their meanings, underlying assumptions, and social, cultural, and historical contexts through close readings of short passages from philosophical texts.
- c. This course will be listed in the Philosophy & Religion Department (PHIL).

**13. Graduate Course Status:** N/A

**14. Degree Requirements:** The course counts as an elective for the major and the minor in Philosophy & Religion. It will not change the total number of credits in the major or minor.

**15. Specialized Accreditation, Certification, and Licensure:** N/A

**16. Assessment/Evaluation of Student Outcomes and Determining Student Grades:**

- a. Class Participation 20% (SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7; T1WC1-5)
- b. Presentation 20% (SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7)

c. 7 (seven) Written Introspection Exercises 35% (SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7; T1WC1-5)

d. Final Essay (**Signature Assignment**) 25% (SLO: DS1-6; T1CTPS1-7; T1WC1-5)

The **Signature Assignment** will ask students to identify a belief common in our culture and evaluate it in light of what they have learned in this course. They will make use of their critical thinking skills in testing the belief for rational consistency, soundness, and hidden assumptions. They will evaluate it by comparing it to other beliefs, in this or another culture. Finally, they will determine whether it is consistent with their own system of beliefs.

## 17. Bibliography (MLA):

### a. Required Text

John Perry, Michael Bratman, John Martin Fischer, 'Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 6th Edition, 2012

### b. Supporting Bibliography

Anagnostopoulou, Georgios. A Companion to Aristotle. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009

Barnes, Jonathan. The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995

Benson, Hugh. A Companion to Plato. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006

Davies, Brian. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993

Gale, Richard. The Blackwell Guide to Metaphysics. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002

Garrett, Brian. What is this thing called Metaphysics? London: Taylor & Francis, 2006

Gomberg, Paul. What Should I Believe? Philosophical Essays for Critical Thinking. Toronto, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2011.

Hume, David. A Treatise of Human Nature. Oxford: Clarendon, 1978

Hume, David. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. Oxford: OUP, 1997

Noonan, Harold W. Personal Identity. London: Routledge, 1989

Kant, Immanuel. A Critique of Pure Reason, ed. Kemp Smith, Norman. New York: St. Martins, 1965

Loux, Michael J. Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction. London: Routledge, 1998

Lowe, Jonathan. A Survey of Metaphysics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002

Kraut, Richard. The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2006

Nadler, Steven ed. A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008

Nozick, Robert. The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations. New York and London: Simon and Schuster, 2006

Perry, John. Personal Identity. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975

Perry, John. Personal Identity. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975

Rorty, Amelie. *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992

Shields, Christopher. *Ancient Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2012

Shields, Christopher. *Aristotle*. London: Routledge, 2007

**c. Relevant Periodical Sources**

*Ancient Philosophy*

*Apeiron*

*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*

*Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*

*Philosophical Review*

*Philosophical Studies*

**d. Relevant Online Resources**

Textbook Companion website:

<http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780199812998/>

*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ([www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu))

*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ([plato.stanford.edu](http://plato.stanford.edu))

**18. Budget:** No additional budget is required.

**19. Enrollment and Scheduling:** Every semester, with a maximum of 20 students.