

PHIL 1101: Problems of Philosophy
Spring 2020
MWF 2:30pm – 3:20pm
Location: HPL 25

Instructor: Heather Muraviov (she/her)

Email: heather.muraviov@uconn.edu

Availability: I will do my best to be available throughout the week via email and in-person as much as I possibly can be throughout the semester. Please keep in mind that if I do not respond to your email right away, you may expect a response from me within 24-48 hours at most. There is a higher chance that I will respond to an email quickly on Mondays through Fridays during work hours (9am-5pm). Thank you in advance for understanding, I look forward to our conversations via email and in-person during office hours!

Office Hours: W 3:30pm-4:30pm in HTB 205 (subject to change depending on student availability). Office hours are meant to provide a time and place for us outside of the regular class session to meet and discuss any questions, comments, or concerns you may have about the readings or the content of the course. This will also serve as a time for me to meet with the week's discussion leaders before Friday discussion sessions. Feel free to drop by and say hi at any point in the semester! ☺

Course Description

This course is structured as a brief introduction to philosophy through the study of ethics, knowledge, existence, freedom and the self as they have been discussed in philosophy throughout history by different philosophers and traditions. Throughout this course we will consider some philosophical work from western thinkers, such as Aristotle and René Descartes, while also considering how philosophers and philosophical traditions around the globe answer the same traditional questions and problems, such as Frantz Fanon and Gloria Anzaldúa. Over this course will we gain an understanding of philosophy as activity and what philosophical analysis is comprised of (i.e. methodology and argumentation). We will additionally analyze how our understanding of what philosophy is impacts the way certain thinkers and their ideas are shared with wider audiences. This means that we will look at how particular philosophical labels (ex. western/eastern/non-western and analytic/continental) can contribute to or take away from understanding various philosophical insights, topics, and concepts from different thinkers.

Class Structure & Policies (University + My Own):

In this course, all UConn policies are in effect. I will highlight two relevant ones here:

Academic Integrity: I have created the assignments in the course to minimize any attempts (intentional or mistaken) to violate this policy. However, plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses which will not be tolerated in this class. Assignments in which plagiarism or other forms of cheating are found will at the least be graded at 0 (not just an F). Repeated or egregious (>20% of course grade value) violations of the university policy will result in an F in the course. To avoid plagiarism, please see the [University Resources on Academic Integrity](#).

[Disability Accommodations](#): Please notify me in-person and/or via email if you have registered with CSD (Center for Students with Disabilities), this helps me to ensure that I accommodate you as efficiently as possible in the classroom and around assignments and exams. If you need to request accommodations for a documented disability, you can do so [here](#).

If you have any further questions about the UConn policies, please come talk to me.

Issues: In case of an emergency, or if anything comes up that may prevent you from completing course requirements, I ask that you please contact me to make arrangements as soon as possible. Since each of you have the opportunity to sign-up for the weeks you do reading responses and discussion leading, I recommend signing up for these during weeks where you may have less work to do for other classes.

Use of Electronics: I will allow **minimal use** of electronic devices (limited to devices used for note-taking or to refer to the reading). All cellphones should be put away during class time. It is important that we all stay engaged with each other and the material in order to get the most out of our time together each week. Additionally, please keep in mind that excessive use of electronics for anything other than notetaking, classwork, or assigned reading will result in a low participation grade, which can easily make the difference between an A- and a B+ or a B- and a C+, for example.

Course Requirements

**** Please double check that you can access and use your UConn email address. This is the primary way I will communicate with the class outside of our meeting time and Husky CT.*

Each week, it is expected that you...

- finish the assigned reading for the week,
- bring a copy of the assigned reading for the week in-class, for your reference,
- notes, questions to ask and/or thoughts to write down or share with the rest of the class.

[P] Participation (10%):

Because philosophy is a participatory subject and activity, you are encouraged to be an active participant in our class. There is not only lots of reading, analyzing and writing to be done, but also many discussions to be had. That being said, our classroom discussions are going to be exploratory in nature, do not worry about being wrong or correct throughout discussions. The classroom should remain a space for collaborative, respectful, and productive conversations throughout our time together. Your participation in the class contributes to our learning as a class and makes it more worthwhile, enjoyable, and interesting for everyone involved.

Each of you will start out the semester with full participation credit, under the assumption that you participate throughout the semester. Participation here requires more than consistent attendance alone. You will be graded on the quality and the significance of your participation throughout the course. Below are a number of ways to maintain your full-credit participation grade (though, this is not exhaustive): reading quizzes, verbally, through written work, by helping your peers, asking questions, answering questions from me or others in the class, providing critical comments to the text, turning in any participation worksheets, visiting me during office hours, etc.

Regarding Questions: You are not expected to know all of the vocabulary or concepts that you may encounter in the readings or lectures. Because of this, you are encouraged to ask any substantive and/or clarificatory questions about specific words, readings or lecture material during class. It is highly likely that your peers also have similar questions and may benefit from others asking questions as well.

[RR] Reading Responses (20% graded as ✓+, ✓, ✓-): Each student will be responsible for 3 reading responses over the course of the semester. These are to be around 400-500 words each, around 2 pages double-spaced and should be comprised of a short, concise summary of one of the assigned readings for the week followed by two (2) comments and (1) question you may have about the reading. The point of this assignment is to help you practice writing, assessing, and discussing your thoughts in light of what authors have argued or discussed in their work. These will also serve as a way to get a class-wide or group-wide discussion going on the reading/topic of the week.

RRs are due in-class on the Monday that we will begin discussing the week's readings. This will allow me enough time to begin grading them and to engage with your ideas in preparation for the next class session. Expect a 1-2 week turnaround for these.

[DL] Discussion Leading (20% graded out of 100 points, instructions on a separate sheet): Each student is responsible for leading a discussion with another student on the assigned reading for the week at least one time during the semester. These will usually take place every Friday (unless otherwise noted) and take up most of the class meeting time. This assignment is meant for you to have a chance to help your peers solidify their understanding of that week's material and to address any lingering concerns or questions that come up throughout the week. You are required to present the material (~15 minutes), come up with at least 3 relevant discussion questions and/or create a small, engaging in-class activity (~15 minutes). A sign-up sheet will be circulated that is first come, first choice and then it will be uploaded to Husky CT. If you do not sign up, your name will be placed in an available slot and you will be responsible for that week's reading along with your partner.

[M] Midterm Exam (20% graded out of 100 points):

During Week 8, there will be a midterm on 3/13/20. This is an assessment that will help me to see whether or not you (individually and as a class) are grasping the material we are going over in the course. Though the midterm requires no original ideas or argumentation, it may involve some or all of the following: definitions, matching the philosopher to the quote, concept, or theory and some multiple-choice questions. It will also include either short answer questions or an essay portion.

[F][FP] Final Exam or Final Paper/Project (30% graded out of 100 points, instructions for RP on separate sheet):

Toward the end of the semester, you will be asked to decide whether you would like to:

1. Take a final exam which will be non-cumulative and similar to the format of the midterm. *The final exam will take place during Week 16 on Friday 5/1/20 at 12pm.*
2. Write an essay in one of the following formats: argumentative, comparative, journalism piece, reflection paper, or another form of writing with my approval. *Due during Week 16 on Friday 5/1/20 at 12pm.*
3. Complete a creative project related to the course: a podcast episode, a comic book strip, transposing a philosophical text into the format of a play, or another form of creative endeavor with my approval. *Due during Week 16 on Friday 5/1/20 at 12pm.*

Course Grade Breakdown:

[P] Participation 10%
[RR] Reading Responses 20%
[DL] Discussion Leading 20%
[M] Midterm 20%
[F][FP] Final Exam/Final Paper/Project 30%

Grading Scale:

94 - 100 A
90 - 93 A-
86 - 89 B+
82 - 85 B
78 - 81 B-
74 - 77 C+
70 - 73 C
66 - 69 C-
62 - 65 D+
58 - 61 D
54 - 57 D-
< 54 F

Reading Schedule:

The schedule below is subject to change based on class interest and the depth of our discussions. Please check your UConn email and Husky CT for updates throughout the semester, I may also announce changes in class. You will find **all** readings on Husky CT (📖) as I scan them. You may choose to purchase some of the books (📖) we will be reading from at used bookstores or online.

Week 1 (1/22, 1/25) Introductions, What is Philosophy?

- Brief overview lecture on the history of philosophy, philosophy as historical intellectual tradition, philosophy as everyday activity, philosophy as a discipline.
- “The Value of Philosophy” (Bertrand Russell) 📖
- “Does Philosophy Begin (and End) in Wonder? Or What Is the Nature of a Philosophic Act?” (Maxine Sheets Johnstone) 📖

Week 2 (1/27, 1/29, 1/31) Rhetoric and Argumentation

- Continuation of last week’s lecture introducing argumentation, persuasion, reasoning, fallacies and methodological considerations.
- *On Rhetoric*, Book I, Chapters 1, 2, 5. (Aristotle) 📖/📖

Week 3 (2/3, 2/5, 2/7) The Good Life – Happiness

- Selected passages from *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle) 📖/📖
- “Making Sense of My Life as a Whole” pp. 27-46 (Julia Annas) 📖

Week 4 (2/10, 2/12, 2/14) Virtue Ethics

- Selected passages from *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle) 📖/📖
- “Ethics and Self-Cultivation in Ancient China” pp. 12-51 (Confucius, Alexis McLeod) 📖

Week 5 (2/17, 2/19, 2/21) Epistemology – Skepticism

- *Meditations on First Philosophy* Meditation I and II (René Descartes) 📖
- Selected passages from “The Will to Believe” pp. 92-107 (William James) 📖

Week 6 (2/24, 2/26, 2/28) Epistemology – Knowledge

- Continue discussing “The Will to Believe” pp. 92-107 (William James) 📖
- “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (Edmund Gettier) 📖

Week 7 (3/2, 3/4, 3/6) Personal Identity

- Selected passages from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (John Locke) 📖
- “The Role of Wisdom and the Insubstantiality of the Self” from *Understanding Asian Philosophy* (Alexis McLeod) 📖

Week 8 (3/9, 3/11, 3/13) – MIDTERM EXAM

- 3/9 – Wrapping up the first half of the semester’s readings.
- 3/11 – Review Session
- 3/13 – Midterm Exam

Week 9 – SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

Week 10 (3/23, 3/25, 3/27) Existentialism

- Selections from *The Gay Science* (Friedrich Nietzsche) 📖/📖
- “The Humanism of Existentialism” pp. 290-308 (Jean-Paul Sartre) 📖/📖

Week 11 (3/30, 4/1, 4/3) Oppression

- “Oppression” pp. 11-16 (Marilyn Frye) 📖
- “Introduction” from *The Second Sex* pp. 3-17 (Simone de Beauvoir) 📖/📖
- “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” from *The Souls of Black Folk* (W.E.B. DuBois)

Week 12 (4/6, 4/8, 4/10) Oppression and Language

- Selected passages from *Black Skin White Masks* (Frantz Fanon) 📖/📖
- Selected passages from *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Gloria Anzaldúa) 📖/📖

Week 13 (4/13, 4/15, 4/17) Justice

- Book I of *Republic* (Plato) 📖/📖
- “Justice as Fairness” from *A Theory of Justice* pp. (John Rawls) 📖/📖

Week 14 (4/20, 4/22, 4/24) Responsibility and Action

- Part I from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Simone de Beauvoir) 📖/📖
- Selected passages from *Responsibility for Justice* (Iris Marion Young) 📖/📖

Week 15 (4/27, 4/29, 5/1) Education, Liberation, Freedom

- Lectures on Liberation (Angela Davis) 📖
- “La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness” from *Borderlands/La Frontera* pp. 254-262 (Gloria Anzaldúa) 📖/📖

Week 16 – FINAL EXAM (to be taken: 5/1 at 12pm) OR FINAL PAPER/PROJECT (due by: 5/1 at 12pm)