

Philosophy 501
Foundations of Philosophical Thought

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Monday 4-6:30
Room: W/5/104

This course introduces graduate students in the Critical and Creative Thinking Program to some of the traditional problems and methods of philosophical inquiry. It also relates philosophy to concerns about good thinking, educational reform, and teaching for effective thinking and considers how to infuse philosophical thinking into workplaces, school curricula, and our own lives.

We will become acquainted with several central philosophical problems. What is it to think philosophically? Why should one be moral? What is justice? What is knowledge? How can concrete moral issues such as abortion, stem cell research, euthanasia, and war be thought through? We will not find final answers to these questions. Rather we will: (1) seek to understand why these are such important and open questions, (2) begin to explore ways of answering them, (3) consider how to draw students and others into further engagement with philosophical thinking, and (4) find connections between such questions and other questions we have. The course provides a basis for further work in CCT, Education or many other fields.

The course will proceed primarily through discussion and writing in a classroom community of inquiry. You are expected to contribute to the learning experience in the class as well as to gain useful insights from others. All of us can learn from each other. We understand our thoughts better when we express them. Others may connect with them, find useful implications in them or even challenge them. Our objectives are to enhance thinking skills and habits of careful thinking and sound judgment through active philosophical thinking as well as to gain a familiarity with some important philosophical problems, methods, and concepts.

Texts: G. Lee Bowie, Meredith W. Michaels, and Robert C. Solomon (eds.), Twenty Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy, sixth edition (Wadsworth, 2007)

Plato, Five Dialogues, translated by G.M.A. Grube (Hackett Publishing Co.)

Gareth Matthews, The Philosophy of Childhood (Harvard University Press, 1994)

John Stuart Mill, On Liberty (Hackett Publishing Co.)

Requirements:

- (1) Doing the reading carefully in preparation for class.
- (2) Taking part in class discussion and activities and making a class presentation. The presentation may take any of several forms, including leading the class discussion of an assigned reading or guiding an activity on a related topic. A proposal for the presentation is due Oct. 23. [20%]
- (3) Doing the weekly writing [40 %]. Some weeks there will be a specific assigned topic for a short paper (2-3 double-spaced, typewritten pages). Other weeks you may write informally on any topic of your choice related to the course. This may include reflections on the readings, reactions to the class discussions, thoughts about how you might go about relating the philosophical issues we are considering to your own teaching, careers, and lives, difficulties you are having, and so on. Each week I will collect the written work and respond to it.
- (4) Writing an 8-10 page (double-spaced, typewritten) final paper, due December 18 [40%]. A 2-page proposal for this is due by October 30. The topic of your paper may also be the basis for your presentation, but it need not be. The paper will allow students to pursue their individual interests connected to the themes of the course. Teachers may wish to consider applications to their own teaching and may write on the relationship between philosophical ideas and a wide variety of topics in subject matter instruction.

Schedule and List of Readings

Some additional reading recommendations will be made from time to time.

- 1) Sept. 11 Introduction to the goals of the course. Self-introductions. Free writing exercise on philosophical thinking. A community of inquiry and what is involved in learning philosophy. The relation of philosophy to critical and creative thinking. Philosophical problems.
- 2) Sept. 18 Getting started in philosophy. Philosophical thinking. Socrates and his philosophical activity.

Reading: Plato, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito;
Matthews, The Philosophy of Childhood, pp. 1-18, 68-80 ("Introduction: Getting the Idea," "A Philosopher's View of Childhood," "Children's Rights").

3) Sept. 25 Abortion. Moral reasoning. Multiple perspectives.

Reading: In Twenty Questions, chap. 10, pp. 350-371:
Susan Tracy, "The Abortion";
Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion";
Alice Walker, "Right to Life: What Can the White Man Say to the Black Woman?";
Sidney Callahan, "The Moral Duty to the Unborn and Its Significance"

4) Oct. 2 Human embryo research. Cloning. Another look at Socrates.

Reading: Twenty Questions, pp. 369-377; 305-311:
Dena S. Davis, "Stem Cells, Cloning, and Abortion";
The President's Council on Bioethics, "The Moral Status of the Embryo"
Daniel Callahan, "The Puzzle of Profound Respect: Human Embryo Research";
Mary B. Mahowald and Anthony P. Mahowald, "Embryonic Stem Cell Retrieval and a Possible Ethical Bypass";
Robert Wachbroit, "Genetic Encores: The Ethics of Human Cloning";
Plato, Meno.

Oct. 9 Columbus Day

5) Oct. 16 What is a person? Theories of personal identity.

Reading: Matthews, The Philosophy of Childhood, pp. 81-88 ("Childhood Amnesia");
Twenty Questions, chap. 8, pp. 269-305:
John Perry, "The First Night";
John Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity";
David Hume, "Of Personal Identity";
Meredith W. Michaels, "Persons, Brains, and Bodies";
Justin Leiber, "How to Build a Person";
Simone de Beauvoir, "I am a Woman";

6) Oct. 23 Life and death. Can children be philosophical thinkers?

Reading: Twenty Questions, pp. 383-389:
Chuang-Tzu, "A Taoist on Death";
Thomas Nagel, "Death";
Matthews, The Philosophy of Childhood, pp. 19-53, 89-101 ("Theories and Models of Childhood," "Piaget and Philosophy," "Piaget and Conservation," "Childhood and Death");
Plato, Phaedo.

Proposal for Presentation Due

7) Oct. 30 Euthanasia and assisted suicide. Killing and letting die. Just war.

Reading Twenty Questions, pp. 389-406, 412-416, 418-426; 428-431 :
James Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia";
Bonnie Steinbock, "The Intentional Termination of Life";
Patricia Mann, "Meanings of Death";
Hannah Arendt, "Power and Violence";
John Dear, "The Experiments of Gandhi";
Richard Falk, "Defining a Just War";
Claudia Card, "Questions Regarding a War on Terrorism."

Proposal for Final Paper Due

8) Nov. 6 Egoism and altruism.

Reading: Twenty Questions, chap. 14, pp. 460-483:
Ntozake Shange, "get it & feel good";
Plato, "The Ring of Gyges";
Epicurus, "The Pursuit of Pleasure";
Thomas Hobbes, "People Are Selfish";
Adam Smith, "Compassion";
Richard Dawkins, "The Selfish Gene";
Ayn Rand, "The Virtue of Selfishness";
Tara Smith, "Individual Rights, Welfare Rights";
James Rachels, "Ethical Egoism";
Jim Holt, "The Life of the Saint."

9) Nov. 13 What is the right thing for me to do? Ethical theories. Moral development and moral education.

Reading: Matthews, The Philosophy of Childhood, pp. 54-67 ("Moral Development");
Twenty Questions, chap. 16, pp. 519-556:
"The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount" [from the Bible];
Confucius, "The Analects";
"The Unjust" [from the Koran];
Aristotle, "Happiness and the Good Life";
Immanuel Kant, "Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals";
John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism";
Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Natural History of Morals";
A.J. Ayer, "Emotivism";
Simone de Beauvoir, "Freedom and Morality";
Jonathan Bennett, "The Conscience of Huck Finn";
Claudia Card, "A Feminist View of Ethics";
Robert Kane, "Through the Moral Maze."

10) Nov. 20 Justice. Designing a just society.

Reading: Twenty Questions, chap. 19, pp. 621-641; 644-659:
Plato, "Does Might Make Right?";
Thomas Hobbes, "Justice and the Social Contract";
John Stuart Mill, "A Utilitarian Theory of Justice";
John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness";
Robert Nozick, "The Principle of Fairness";
Peter Singer, "Rich and Poor";
Iris Young, "The Myth of Merit";
Amartya Sen, "Property and Hunger";
Malcolm X, "Human Rights, Civil Rights";
Cheshire Calhoun, "Justice, Care, Gender Bias."

11) Nov. 27 What Do I know? Inquiry and freedom. Literature and art for and by children.

Reading: Twenty Questions, chap. 6, pp. 205-211:
Plato, "The Myth of the Cave";
Rene Descartes, "Meditation";
Lewis Carroll, "Through the Looking Glass";
Mill, On Liberty, pp. 1-52;
Matthews, The Philosophy of Childhood, pp. 102-124 ("Literature for Children," "Child Art").

12) Dec. 4 More on knowledge. Implications for critical and creative thinking.

Reading Twenty Questions, chap 6, pp. 212-226:
Bertrand Russell, "Appearance and Reality";
John Locke, "Where Our Ideas Come From";
George Berkeley, "To Be Is to Be Perceived";
Lorraine Code, "What Can She Know?"

13) Dec. 11 Individuality. Experiments in living. Synthesis.

Reading: Mill, On Liberty, pp. 53-113.

Final Paper Due December 18