Humanities 2700

Introduction to Philosophy
R02 Track B
Second Summer Session 2014

Dr. Elsebet Jegstrup
Office hours: TBD

Course outline:
Why is there something rather than nothing? Who am I? How do I fit into this scheme called existence? What am I supposed to know? What am I supposed to do? How do I know anything? Why am I supposed to know anything? Am I alone? Am I an egomaniac? Who is the self? Where is the other? What is self-interest? What is knowledge? What is truth? Is there such a thing as truth? Is truth possible? Is truth relevant? What is this kind of thinking? Why do I need to think? Why all these questions?

These are all questions of philosophical thinking? The theme of questioning is the theme of the course. Questions of being, knowing and thinking are the kinds of questions that will occupy us.

We will come to understand these questions by reading primary texts by thinkers ancient Greek, modern and contemporary. We will come to understand something about philosophical language, the language of phenomenology, of hermeneutics, of teleology, of ontology, of epistemology, and a little logic. We shall even entertain a scientific conundrum. The overall framework for this philosophical investigation will be the larger question: What constitutes existence? In other words: WHO AM I? WHY AM I? WHAT IS THE MEANING OF ALL THIS?

Required readings:

René Descartes, DISCOURSE ON METHOD and MEDITATIONS ON FIRST PHILOSOPHY, tr. Donald Cress (Hackett Publishing, 1993).

Martin Heidegger, AN INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS, tr. Ralph Manheim (Yale University Press, 1959) (xerox)


Baldo Lucchese, “Mitocondria transfer” (xerox)


Plato, FIVE DIALOGUES, tr. Grube (Hackett, 1981)
Required Course Work

Grade will be based on three 4-6 page papers + 1 in-class logical exercise and participation in class discussion.
Improvement will be factored into the final grade.
NOTE: All required work must be completed in order to pass the course.

THESE TEXTS ARE DIFFICULT AND REQUIRE CAREFUL AND CRITICAL READING AND REFLECTION. Be sure to set enough time aside for such a reading!

Participation is urged!

Students are urged to complete the assigned readings before class time and be prepared to participate in class discussion about the readings. Smart students then read the required texts again after class time in order not just to better understand the texts, but just as important, to understand what has happened in class. Participation is crucial for this course. Logic should tell you that unless you attend class, you cannot participate in class discussion.

Philosophy depends on open dialogue!

This advice should not be ignored. You will only get your money’s worth on your education if you do the reading and participate in class discussion. You will find that coming to understand and to vocally express that understanding and putting things together both orally and in writing, that is, in your arguments, and whenever possible integrating texts and what you learn in the various courses you take and in your life generally, will greatly enhance your university experience. To know is wonderful, to be able to explain what you know and why and how you know is nothing less than marvelous.

You are also advised to take advantage of your instructor’s office hours. I am here to assist you when you don’t understand a text, when you feel uneasy about what is going on in class, or when you are sure you have lost all contact with reality.

Philosophy is difficult, but if you approach these texts without preconceived ideas or opinions about them and philosophy generally, you will find that Philosophy is quite easy and a lot of fun. But it is only fun if you make an effort at understanding and applying what you are learning to your own life experiences. Your reading effort, then, has to be something more than you may be used to. We are not interested in your critique of Plato or any of the other philosophers we read (you do not have the knowledge to go up against any of them). We are interested in your understanding of what the philosophers were possibly trying to tell us. Some of these texts may be ancient, but they are as relevant today as they were then.
So, be sure to come to my office when you are in doubt and do not be disturbed if you are confused or get angry at the texts. When these things happen, it means you are on your way, that you are working with the texts, that understanding is about to happen.

Course schedule:

SECTION 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THINK (outside the box)?

July 1/3  Week 1:  Plato,  FIVE DIALOGUES: Apology, Phaedo
July 8/10  Week 2:  Descartes,  MEDITATIONS 1-3, 6
July 15/17 Week 3:  Heidegger,  AN INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS, chs. 1, 3 (xerox)

First paper due in class Thursday

SECTION 2: WHAT IS THERE TO THINK? WHY MUST I THINK?

July 22/24  Week 4:  Kant,  FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE
July 29/31  Week 5:  Mill,  METAPHYSICS OF MORALS, pp. 17-60
                UTILITARIANISM, pp. 1-12, 41-63

SECTION 3: LOGICAL THINKING; CONSIDERING NEW SCIENCE

Aug. 5/7  Week 6:  In-class Logical exercises

Second paper due in class Thursday

Aug. 12/14 Week 7:  Mitocondria transfer: Human engineering or not?

August 15:  Third paper due at my office between 10-12

NOTE:

ATTENDANCE:  The class will adhere to a policy of no more than three cuts. Any more than that needs a written permission and/or explanation. Cutting class without these will result in final grade reduction at instructor's discretion. Chronic tardiness or leaving class early is NOT acceptable.

TAPING POLICY:  Taping lectures or class activity necessitates instructor’s permission.

COUNCEL:  Hopefully you will discover that to think critically is one of life’s great joys. In fact learning to enjoy any process that has a goal will provide you much greater satisfaction than the goal itself. If you think only of the goal in this or any of your courses, i.e. the paper, the grade, etc., or in your life, i.e. money, success, etc., you will find that you have missed the journey and consequently you have short-changed yourself and failed to realize who you might really be. Remember: PHILOSOPHY IS A WAY OF LIFE