

Syllabus: Introduction to Philosophy (PHIL 10101)

Sec 01: MWF 8:20-9:10

Sec 02: MWF 9:25-10:15

Instructor: Naomi Fisher

Email: nluce1@nd.edu

Office hours: Malloy Hall 213, Tues/Thurs 2-3 pm.

Texts (please buy):

Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Zeyl, Hackett, 1987. ISBN 0872200167

Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Chadwick, Oxford, 2009. ISBN 0199537828

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Cress, Hackett, 1993. ISBN 0872201929

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Common, Dover, 2006. ISBN 0486452468

Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, trans. Garnett, Dover, 1992. ISBN 048627053X

Texts (to be handed out):

Plato, *Republic*, selections

Aquinas, arguments for the existence of God; selections from *Summa contra Gentiles*

Nietzsche, sel'ns from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Genealogy of Morals*

Dostoevsky, selections from *The Brothers Karamazov*

Movie:

Tree of Life by Terrence Malick (2011). This will be available for streaming through Sakai (sakai.nd.edu). I will also organize a screening.

Narrative:

We will begin the class examining what philosophy is, and how it can help us or hinder us in attempting to live well. Plato gives us a very positive view of philosophy, according to which philosophy leads us out of the illusion of our everyday physical existence and into divine truth. We will see how this view of philosophy is taken up and modified in the Christian context, specifically in Augustine, for whom reason and philosophy play a pivotal role in his conversion and religious life. Next we will build on this view of philosophy to see how the medieval and modern philosophers saw the role and limits of the philosophical enterprise, first in Aquinas and then in Descartes. Aquinas is optimistic about human rationality and its ability to discover truth, although for Aquinas (as for Augustine) reason alone does not secure for us the truths required for us to be happy. Descartes, even more optimistic, hopes to build an edifice of certain knowledge based on sure principles. This impossibly high standard for knowledge, as well as the individualistic perspective that he adopts, leads to disorientation and skepticism. We will see the consequences of these views in thinkers such as Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: those things that we think root us in meaning are seen to crumble away. Nietzsche proposes we cope by affirming our own lives and existence. Dostoevsky, concerned about many of the same trends, presents a way of life as the answer. If we love others and appreciate the beauty around us, we will come to see the truth. Thus understanding is a result, rather than a precondition, of living well.

The purpose of this class is to teach you to think and write philosophically, and also to understand how the history of philosophy has contributed to the way we live now. The best way to achieve these goals is to engage in philosophical inquiry through discussions with your peers. In defending our views to others we often come to appreciate better the processes by which we come to hold them. Thus much of class will be spent in discussions. Most of the time we will spend time in small groups discussing the reading questions and then have a discussion involving the entire class.

Tests:

You will have a midterm and a final, each worth 20% of your grade. The format for these tests will be 2 essay questions picked at random from a list of 10 questions that I will give you at least a week in advance. You will not be allowed any materials during the examinations.

Reading quizzes:

There will be a number of reading quizzes throughout the semester. I will not tell you when these quizzes will occur, but they will be at the beginning of class on select days. I will not test for a deep understanding of the text, but merely that you have read the text with a reasonable amount of attention.

If (and only if) you let me know in advance of class that you have a reason to miss that day will the quiz not count against you. Otherwise a missed quiz results in a zero. The quizzes will count for 10% of your final grade.

Papers:

Each paper will be 4 to 6 pages long, and each will be worth 20% of your grade. I will give you more specific instructions when I hand out the assignments. I will usually hold especially long office hours two days before the paper is due.

I will accept only hard copies at the beginning of class on the day the paper is due. (If there is some reason this is not possible, I will accept an emailed copy of the paper until you can get me the hard copy.)

Class Preparation and Participation:

I will hand out or email questions to accompany the readings throughout the semester. You are to think about these questions as you read the texts. They are meant both to help focus your reading and to guide class discussions; please read and think about these questions before and during your reading of the assigned text. We will work through the questions in class, often in small groups at first and then opening it up to a general class discussion. Thinking about these questions and preparing responses to them are an essential part of class preparation.

You are expected to come to class prepared and participate in class discussions. Please let me know if there is some reason you are going to miss class. It is always better to let me know. Your

grade will mostly be based on your contribution to group and class discussions, as well as how much you prepare for class discussions. Active engagement in your small group discussion as well as in the large group discussion will result in a higher participation grade. I'm sure it goes without saying, but I expect you to be civil and respectful in discussion to your peers and to me, even in the midst of disagreement. Here is a 'rubric' to let you know how your grade will be determined:

- A Comes to class prepared and on time, ready to discuss the texts, contributes thoughtfully to both small group and larger group discussions. Has 0-2 unexcused absences.
- B Often contributes to group discussions, but also sometimes appears unprepared or uninterested in the discussions. Has 3-4 unexcused absences.
- C Rarely contributes to discussions, often appears unprepared. Has 5-6 unexcused absences.
- F Anything worse than C.

Honor Code:

Violations of the honor code will not be tolerated. There are many ways to violate the honor code, and you are responsible to know what counts as a violation of the honor code. If you have any doubt, send me an email and I will let you know. Plagiarism can take many forms, but the most common are as follows: using another author's idea in your paper without citation, paraphrasing someone else's work without citation, inserting phrases from another person's work without quotation marks, and extensive collaboration with other students. While discussing the ideas in your paper with other students is worthwhile and I would encourage you to do this, you must write your paper on your own. Most forms of plagiarism can be avoided by simply not consulting any material for your paper except the course readings. Do not consult sources that originate on the internet (e.g. wikipedia). For more information, see philosophy.nd.edu/assets/77703/plagiarism.pdf

Grading

All grading will be done in letter grades, with a possible 'in between' grade for the midterm and final (If you get an A- on one question and a B+ on the other, you will get an A-/B+ on the test). Your final grade will be determined as follows:

- 10% Participation
- 10% Reading quizzes
- 20% Paper 1
- 20% Midterm
- 20% Paper 2
- 20% Final

Laptops, phones, iPads, etc.:

They are not allowed to be out in class at any time.

Tentative Schedule:

Week of 1/15	Introduction; <i>Republic</i> VI and VII (507b-521d)	The good life & philosophy
Week of 1/20	<i>Republic</i> VI and VII (507b-521d); <i>Gorgias</i> 447a-461b	Cave allegory, education
Week of 1/27	<i>Gorgias</i> 461b-481b; 481b-527e	The good life, justice
Week of 2/3	<i>Gorgias</i> 481b-527e, <i>Confessions</i> Books 1-II	Justice and knowledge, Evil
Week of 2/10	<i>The Confessions</i> (Books III-V)	seeking truth
Week of 2/17	<i>The Confessions</i> (Books VI-VIII, X)	Platonism, Conversion
Week of 2/24	Midterm review; Aquinas (selections)	Faith and reason

Wednesday, 2/26 Midterm (during regular class time)

Week of 3/3	Aquinas (selections)	Arguments for the existence of God, happiness
-------------	----------------------	---

Wednesday, 3/5 Paper 1 due**Week of 3/10 Spring Break**

Week of 3/17	Descartes <i>Meditations</i> I-III	Starting from scratch with knowledge
Week of 3/24	Descartes IV-VI, Nietzsche (sel.)	Descartes fails to find certainty
Week of 3/31	Nietzsche (cont.)	Starting from scratch with how to live
Week of 4/7	Nietzsche	Affirmation
Week of 4/14	Dostoevsky (Friday off)	Skepticism and action

Wednesday, 4/16 Paper 2 Due

Week of 4/21	(Monday off) Dostoevsky	Love and suffering
Week of 4/28	<i>Tree of Life</i> , Recap	

Final Exam: Thursday, May 8th, 8:00-10:00 am