

Philosophy 501/CCT 603
Foundations of Philosophical Thought

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Tuesdays 4-6:45
Room: W/2/157

This course introduces graduate students in the Critical and Creative Thinking Graduate 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, seventh edition (Wadsworth, 2011)

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 by October 14. [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. The writing assignment for December 2 will be the course metacognitive assignment, suitable for inclusion in your Reflective Practice and Metacognitive Portfolio.

(4) Writing an 8-10 page (double-spaced, typewritten) final paper, due December 16 [40%]. A 2-page proposal for this is due by October 28. 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, for example, 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. There will be a variety of further handouts, including study questions on the readings, CCT tools, and UMB and CCT policies or links to them.

1) Sept. 2 Organizational meeting

2) Sept. 9 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.
Free inquiry.

Reading: Mill, On Liberty, pp. 1-52;

3) Sept. 16 Philosophical thinking. Socrates and his philosophical activity.

Reading: Plato, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito.

4) Sept. 23 Children as philosophers. Philosophizing about children.

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

5) Sept. 30 Abortion. Moral reasoning. Multiple perspectives.

Reading: Twenty Questions, chap. 11, pp. 404-437:
Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion";
Anthony Kenny, "The Beginning of Individual Human Life";
Lynne Rudder Baker, "When Does a Person Begin?";
Susanne Gibson, "The Problem of Abortion: Essentially Contested
Concepts and Moral Autonomy";
Alice Walker, "Right to Life: What Can the White Man Say to the Black
Woman?"

6) Oct. 7 Terrorism. Another look at Socrates.

Reading: Twenty Questions, chap 12, pp. 441-464:
Michael Walzer, "Terrorism and Just War";
Alison M. Jaggar, "What is Terrorism, Why is it Wrong, and Could it
Ever be Morally Permissible?";
Claudia Card, "Questions Regarding a War on Terrorism";
Charles Krauthammer, "The Truth About Torture";
Henry Shue, "Torture in Dreamland: Disposing of the Ticking Bomb."

Plato, Meno.

7) Oct. 14 What is a person? Theories of personal identity.

Proposal for Presentation Due

Reading: Matthews, The Philosophy of Childhood, pp. 81-88 ("Childhood
Amnesia");
Twenty Questions, chap. 9, pp. 325-361:
John Perry, "The First Night";
John Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity";
David Hume, "Of Personal Identity";
Meredith W. Michaels, "Persons, Brains, and Bodies";
Elizabeth Wolgast, "Personal Identity: Many Criteria";
Bernard Williams, "Identity and Identities."

8) Oct. 21 Life and death. Can children be philosophical thinkers?

Reading: Twenty Questions, pp. 98-99, 102-122:
Sogyal Rinpoche, "Excerpt from the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying";
Chuang-Tzu, "A Taoist on Death";
Epicurus, "Death Is Nothing to Us";
Robert C. Solomon, "Looking Forward to Death";
Thomas Nagel, "Death";
Jeff Malpus, "The Strangeness of 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.

9) Oct. 28 Emotions.

Proposal for Final Paper Due

Reading Twenty Questions, pp. 365-388, 391-398 :
Aristotle, "On Anger";
Rene Descartes, "The Passions of the Soul";
David Hume, "On Pride";
William James. "What Is an Emotion?";
Jean-Paul Sartre, "Emotions as Transformations of the World";
Robert C. Solomon, "What Love Is";
Robert C. Solomon, "Grief";
Owen Flanagan, "Destructive Emotions."

10) Nov. 4 Egoism and altruism.

Reading: Twenty Questions, chap. 14, pp. 506-537:
Ntozake Shange, "get it & feel good";
Plato, "The Ring of Gyges";
Epicurus, "The Pursuit of Pleasure";
Thomas Hobbes, "People Are Selfish";
Richard Dawkins, "The Selfish Gene";
Sharon Begley, "Adventures in Good and Evil: The Evolutionary Roots
of Mortality"
James Rachels, "Ethical Egoism";
Ayn Rand, "The Virtue of Selfishness";
Peter Singer, "Ivan Boesky's Choice";
Tracy Kidder, "The Good Doctor";
Jim Holt, "The Life of the Saint."

11) Nov. 11 Veterans Day

12) Nov. 18 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";
David Hume, "Morality is an Emotional Response";

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";
Claudia Card, "A Feminist View of Ethics";
Robert Kane, "Through the Moral Maze."

13) Nov. 25 Justice. Designing a just society.

Reading: Twenty Questions, chap. 19, pp. 681-719:
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";
David Brooks, "Triumph of Hope over Self-Interest";
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."

14) Dec. 2 What Do I know? Inquiry and freedom. Literature and art for and by children.

Reading: Twenty Questions, chap. 7, pp. 205-211:
Plato, "The Myth of the Cave";
Rene Descartes, "Meditations I and II";
Mark Rowlands, "Keanu's Cartesian Meditations";
Lewis Carroll, "Through the Looking Glass";

Matthews, The Philosophy of Childhood, pp. 102-124 ("Literature for Children," "Child Art").

Metacognitive assignment due

15) Dec. 9 Synthesis. Individuality. Experiments in living.

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

Final Paper Due December 16

Course Policies:

1. If you are having difficulty in completing an assignment or paper, please contact me to work out the problems. Extensions can be given in unusual circumstances. However, late papers will not be accepted if I have not given prior approval .
2. Incompletes for the course can only be given with prior discussion and consent of the instructor.
3. In accordance with Section 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 the University of Massachusetts Boston attempts to accommodate all students with certified “special needs”. Through the Lillian Semper Ross Center for Disability Services various aids such as sign language interpreting, readers, testing accommodations, counseling, etc. are available to students. If you believe that you have such special needs you should contact the Center on the first floor of the McCormack Building (287-7430) as soon as possible.
4. It is assumed that in this class each student and I will act in a professional and honest manner. Therefore, any student who engages in an act of Academic Dishonesty, plagiarizing a paper (copying from any source without quotes and referencing is plagiarizing), falsifying data, paraphrasing other student’s weekly reactions, etc., will receive a failing grade for that assignment and in most cases a failing grade for the course. Please review the sections on Academic Standards, Cheating, and Plagiarism (pg. 44, 45), sections II and IV, and V of the Code of Student Conduct (pg. 48-52) in the University Undergraduate Catalog 2000-2001. If you still have questions about Academic Honesty or expectations in this course see me well prior to the due date of the assignment.