



## Summer Program 2015

# For the Love of Wisdom A Journey in Philosophy & Critical Thought

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### Course Description

A great philosopher once said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Curiously enough, it was this attitude that led the same philosopher to his own death. The rulers of Athens decided that Socrates’ philosophical questioning was corrupting the youth, that it was offensive to the gods, and that for this he should have to drink a lethal dose of poison hemlock. Rather than trying to flee, Socrates accepted his fate and told his companions not to worry, assuring them that “no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death.”

Can philosophical questioning truly give someone the confidence to pursue what is important in life, or perhaps even the courage to face death? We will find out together by coming face-to-face with some of life’s most important and difficult questions, many of which Socrates himself grappled with over 2,000 years ago. Food, games, movies, music and more will act as fun catalysts for our thoughts, and the interests of our group will determine where our conversations lead. Along the way, we will develop concrete skills in critical thinking, empathy, cooperative discussion, logic, and creative questioning. Thankfully, no hemlock will be consumed.

### Essential Questions

Many of us are familiar with the reputation of historical philosophers: Old white men who liked to sit alone in their arm chairs, ruminating alone about abstract questions (and they probably smelled like musty old pipe tobacco, too). We can respect them for their intelligence and their commitment to intellectual pursuit, and just as well we can choose to carve our own path in the world of philosophical thinking. After all, for us the world of philosophical thinking can’t be anything other than the world that we live in now. So, while we will learn and draw inspiration from the works of important philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Marilyn Frye, our primary focus will be on realizing and refining our own philosophical investigations.

The questions we encounter may include, but certainly will not be limited to:

- What does it mean to live a good life?
- What is the nature of reality?
- What is the nature, or importance, of death?
- What are the similarities and differences between eastern and western philosophy?
- What role does philosophy play in social and political progress?
- What is the practical value in doing philosophy?

### Outcomes

As an academic discipline, philosophy is often valued for the way it promotes critical thinking. Just as important, however, will be nurturing other essential skills, including empathy, creativity, flexibility and open-mindedness (just to name a few). Thus, everyone should emerge as more creative, confident, critical, and empathetic ambassadors of their own ideas.

We will also concentrate on developing a strong sense of how to recognize, discuss, and independently investigate the philosophical questions embedded in our own experiences. Along the way, we'll pick up working knowledge regarding the main branches of philosophy (ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, and epistemology) as well as a cursory knowledge of some historical philosophers and their views.

### **Instructional Strategies**

While we will be carefully poking and prodding at some of the most complex and important questions imaginable, I believe it is of the utmost importance that we also do so in a way that is fun. As an instructor I will use every tool at my disposal, including food, games, movies, puzzles, and more to keep us engaged and to act as catalysts for lively group discussions.

Along with the discussions that we carry on in large and small groups, it will be important for everyone to have time to reflect individually on the ideas with which we've been grappling. Some of this will happen at home with readings and written reflections, some will take place in class during independent thinking times. Everyone will be given opportunities to pursue lines of questioning in which they are personally invested.

### **Student Assessment**

While the questions we examine will often be abstract, I will attempt to make grading and assessment as concrete and transparent as possible through the use of rubrics. Primarily, assessments in this class will be used as tools to help us improve as philosophers by showing us where we are strong as well as where we can grow.

The more skills that everyone will be assessed on are as follows:

- **(40%) The ability to engage others in philosophical conversation** through
  - wondering aloud
  - sharing ideas in a clear and concise way
  - active listening
  - and/or respectful critique.
- **(40%) The ability to construct and explore philosophical problems in writing** that is
  - clear and concise
  - organized
  - persuasive and logical
  - and includes original thinking.
- **(20%) The ability to independently explore a philosophical problem of the student's interest** through
  - a creative work of art
  - a performance
  - a piece of written reflection
  - a presentation

### **Resources and Materials**

Everyone will need a notebook or binder with which to take notes, as well as one or more writing utensils.

Out of class, you will need access to a computer and printer for typed homework assignments.

Other resources, readings, and materials will be provided by the instructor.

## Tentative Course Schedule

Date	Topic(s)	In-Class Activities
<b>Week 1 (June 29th-July 2nd)</b>	<b>Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Logic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Strawberry: What do you know? How do you know it?</li> <li>• Reading: An excerpt from Plato's <i>Republic</i></li> <li>• Inductive and deductive logic. Logical fallacies.</li> <li>• Reading: An excerpt from David Hume's <i>Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i></li> <li>• Induction Egg Drop Activity</li> <li>• Changing Parts: Metaphysics with LEGO's</li> </ul>
<b>Week 2 (July 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>)</b>	<b>Ethics, Happiness, and the Good Life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experimental Philosophy: Happiness Survey &amp; Data</li> <li>• Reading: Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i></li> <li>• Reading: Plato's <i>Protagoras</i></li> <li>• Silent Discussion: Ethical Dilemmas</li> <li>• Split or Steal Prisoner's Dilemma Game</li> </ul>
<b>Week 3 (July 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>)</b>	<b>Social, Political, and Feminist Philosophy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading: An excerpt from Plato's <i>Republic</i></li> <li>• Reading: Marilyn Frye's <i>Oppression</i></li> <li>• Group Project: The Ideal Society</li> <li>• Film Analysis: The Help</li> <li>• "Is Life Fair?" Narrative Writing Activity</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4 (July 20<sup>th</sup>-July 23<sup>rd</sup>)</b>	<b>Eastern Philosophy &amp; Philosophy of Religion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading: <i>Brahmanadarika: The Story of a Brahman's Daughter</i></li> <li>• Reading: Plato's <i>Phaedo</i></li> <li>• Reading: <i>The Bhagavad-Gita</i></li> <li>• When political, feminist, and religious philosophy collide: The Hijab Debate</li> </ul>
<b>Week 5 (July 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>)</b>	<b>Existential Philosophy &amp; Meta-philosophy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading: Albert Camus' <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i></li> <li>• Reading: An excerpt from Nietzsche's <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i></li> <li>• Independent Investigation Project</li> </ul>