

**PL101—Problems in Philosophy**  
**Fall 2008**  
**Dr. Coleen Zoller**

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*“The unexamined life is not worth living for human beings.” --Plato, Apology38a*

*“For this is an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher, this wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else.” --Plato, Theaetetus 155d*

*“Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.” --Bertrand Russell, “The Value of Philosophy”*

**Course Description:**

The routine of daily life can induce someone to live passively, accepting human experience at face value rather than really thinking about it. From time to time we do stop to think about some aspects of life, but for a philosopher thinking critically is a **way of life**. This reflective activity is the **wondering** with which Plato said philosophy begins. The primary activity in this course is wondering about various questions with which philosophers have struggled for millennia, such as: Can one know anything for sure? If so, what is the difference between knowledge and belief? What is the difference between reality and mere appearance? Does God exist? If so, what does the existence of evil imply about God? What is the relation of faith to reason? Do human beings have free will? Is the future caused by prior events? Who/what determines what is morally right and wrong? How should one make moral decisions? What is justice? Which people and principles should govern us?

**Course Objectives:**

The general aim of a philosophy course is, as Kant wrote, to “have the courage to use your *own* mind!” More specifically, as a course that satisfies the Central Curriculum Ethics requirement, students in this course should:

- Closely read and analyze philosophical texts for understanding
- Critically read and analyze philosophical texts for evaluation
- Identify the fundamental vocabulary, questions, theories, and problems in philosophy
- Identify and question one’s own beliefs about knowledge, consciousness, free will, responsibility, morality, justice, self, society, and God

- Recognize the relevance of philosophy and apply philosophical theories to real-life decision-making
- Debate effectively (in speaking as well as in writing), including: expositing positions, organizing thoughts logically, analyzing and evaluating arguments, and accounting for a variety of viewpoints

**Required Texts(Always bring your own copy of the day's reading with you to class):**

**Book:**

*Does the Center Hold?*(4th edition), ed. Donald Palmer (McGraw Hill)

**E-Res (print out your own copies):**

W.K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"

Bertrand Russell, "Why I Am Not a Christian"

Simon Blackburn, "The Problem of Evil" from *Think*

Arthur Ashe, excerpt from *Days of Grace*

Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Rebellion" from *The Brothers Karamozov*

Robert Solomon, "Rationality, Truth, and the Problem of Knowledge" from *The Little Philosophy Book*

David Linden, "Sensation and Emotion" from *The Accidental Mind: How Brain Evolution Has Given Us Love, Memory, Dreams, and God*

Walter Stace, "The Problem of Free Will"

Raja Halwani, "Homer and Aristotle" from *The Simpsons and Philosophy*

Mary Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword"

John Krakauer, excerpt from *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*

James Rachels, "Vegetarianism and the 'Other Weight Problem'"

Alison Jaggar, "Can Philosophy Be Feminist?"

Peter Singer, excerpt from *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*

Henry David Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience"

Mitch Earlywine, excerpt from *Understanding Marijuana*

Eric Schlosser, excerpt from *Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs, and Cheap Labor in the American Black Market*

**Films:**

"Unser Taglich Brot" / "Our Daily Bread" (2005, dir. Nikolaus Geyrhalter; 92 min)

"Sicko" (2007, dir. Michael Moore; 123 min)

"Grass" (1999, dir. Ron Mann; 80 min)

**Grading:**

Participation (including reflection papers)	= 25%
Term Paper	= 25%
Quizzes	= 25%
Final Exam	= 25%

**Office hours:** Please take advantage of my office hours to discuss any problems you have with the reading assignments, discussions in class, meaning of life, etc. Do not feel

that you must have a carefully formulated set of questions before you come to see me. The articulation of the problem is often the main stumbling block; so if something is an issue for you, don't hesitate to talk with me about it.

### **Course Requirements:**

#### ***A. Reading and the Reflection Papers***

"To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books [especially great books] must be read as deliberately and as reservedly as they were written."

-Thoreau, *Walden*

One might mistakenly think that simply running one's eyes over the assigned reading means that one is prepared for class. This assumption neglects reflection. The way to get the most out of your reading and out of class is to spend time BEFORE CLASS *thinking about* each reading so that you will be prepared to answer fact-type questions (e.g., During which century did Plato write?) as well as evaluation-type questions (e.g., do you agree with Plato when he has Socrates say that the unexamined life is not worth living?).

To assist in your reflection on the readings, each student must write a short reflection paper for each class for which a reading assignment is given. A reflection paper must:

1. state the main point of the reading (i.e., the main thing that the author is trying to say).
2. ask a question about the reading (make sure it is in the form of a question). This question should be an "unanswered question" by which I mean that it should be an interesting and *difficult* question (i.e., one to which there is no easy or obvious answer). If, after stating the question, you can provide a simple, snappy answer to it, then the question is not a good one.
3. explain why your question is *interesting, difficult, and/or important to you* (not to me, not to your classmates, not Plato...just YOU!). Do **NOT** attempt to answer your question in place of this explanation, and don't choose questions that are not interesting to you.

- These papers are due in class and NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR **ANY** REASON EVER!
- Each paper must be clearly labeled to correspond to the reading (note the name of the author of the reading, the name of reading—books titles should be italicized, while article titles should be in quotation marks—and the pages numbers).
- To do well on this assignment, it is important that you follow the directions strictly.
- Reflection papers count toward the participation grade.

***B. Attendance:*** All students are expected to attend *all* classes. If you must be absent, it is advisable to (1) either call or e-mail me *before* class to explain and (2) provide proper documentation of illness (note from health center), personal or family emergency (note from Dean of Students), or a required university event (note from coach/instructor). As detailed

in the student handbook, missing six or more classes (including those that are “excused”) shall result in failure of the course.

***C. Class Participation:***

*1. My Assumptions:*

- a. Every one of us is able to contribute something to our class discussions.
- b. No one knows everything.
- c. You are citizens (not consumers) at this university.
- d. Questions are just as important as comments.
- e. Expressing agreement with a classmate’s comment is just as valuable as expressing disagreement.
- f. Coming to class unprepared is disrespectful to your peers who are prepared.
- g. Some of you are shy about speaking publicly.
- h. Some of you don’t believe you can learn from class discussions with your peers.
- i. Those of you who take more time to ruminate sometimes resent students who appear to “shoot their mouths off.”
- j. Some of you would prefer to be fed information directly by the instructor.
- k. Many of you wonder why this and other courses ask students to participate.
- l. Some of you wonder what exactly an instructor expects when s/he asks you to participate and how this will be graded.
- m. Laptop computers may be used in class only with proper documentation from the SU Health and Counseling Center.
- n. Cell phones should be entirely silent and stowed in your bag for the duration of all class meetings.**

*2. Why participate?* There are two main reasons to participate in your classes. First, pedagogical research has demonstrated that students learn more when they actively participate in class discussions. Second, all students have a civic responsibility to offer their questions and thoughts so that the entire class can collaboratively learn the course material. Furthermore, participating in class will help you practice having thoughtful conversations outside of class.

*3. Class format:* The format of this class will vary from day to day, including all of the following: recitation “lectures”, conversations, debates, seminar. What I mean by recitation “lectures” is that when presenting new material, my presentation will include calling on students to elicit information about the readings. When class takes the form of a conversation I will ask students to discuss their responses to the texts and the issues they raise. Frequently there will be smaller group discussions—sometimes these will involve debating the strengths and weaknesses of theories and ideas, other times these will involve in-depth analysis of the day’s topic.

*4. Assistance:* As soon as possible anyone who feels ill at ease should discuss with the instructor ways of easing oneself into participation.

*5. Rubric:* A participation grade will be assigned to each student based on which of the following regularly applied to her/him:

F = not physically present, or *severely detracting from* classroom discussion (e.g., **sleeping** and/or behaving in a manner that is disrespectful **such as checking and/or sending text messages and/or failing to silence cell phones**)

D = present physically but not mentally and/or not being prepared, or *detracting from* classroom discussion (e.g., **regular mid-class bathroom trips, being unprepared, not having text and classroom supplies with you**, having side conversations, daydreaming, making totally irrelevant comments, etc.)

C = **present, alert, and prepared for class** (e.g., having read required texts in at least a cursory way, bringing text and classroom supplies with you to class, reflecting in advance on the day's texts, **having written a reflection paper**, etc.), and **adding to the discussion but in only minimal ways**

B = present, alert, prepared for class (e.g., having read required texts with significant attention, bringing text and classroom supplies with you to class, reflecting in advance on the day's texts, having written a reflection paper, etc.), and **contributing to class discussion (e.g., communicating some understanding of the text, asking related questions, sharing ideas, maintaining an appropriate balance of talking & listening, etc.)**

A = present, alert, prepared (e.g., having read required texts thoroughly, bringing notes, text--**with significant passages marked**--and classroom supplies with you to class, reflecting in advance on the day's texts, having written a reflection paper as well as some additional questions to ask to further the conversation, etc.), and **making thoughtful contributions to classroom discussion based on engagement with the texts** (e.g., communicating one's understanding of the text and the overall course, posing related questions to both the instructor and fellow students, sharing ideas and responding to the ideas of others, maintaining an appropriate balance of talking and listening, **applying course material to personal experience; actively engaging in one's own learning**, etc.)

#### *D. Quizzes and Exams:*

There shall be six unannounced quizzes throughout the semester as well as a final exam. These will test your understanding of the reading material and what is covered in class. All quizzes and the exam will be cumulative. A missed quiz or exam earns a zero (unless permission for an alternative has been granted by the professor IN ADVANCE—and I do not automatically grant these requests). The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

#### *E. Writing:*

Each student must write a formal philosophical essay of approximately 6 pages in which one's own philosophical position is explained and defended. Each student chooses a position from the various positions explored during in-class debates. In this assignment you will need to demonstrate both your understanding and evaluation of relevant course texts. Details about this assignment will be announced well in advance of the due date. All papers must be submitted BOTH in hardcopy to me as well as in e-copy to turnitin.com. In advance of the due date you must set up an account (unless you already have one) at [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) (the class ID # is 2333797 and the case-sensitive password is Philosophy).

**Policy on Cheating, Plagiarism, and other forms of Academic Dishonesty:**

All forms of plagiarism and cheating are prohibited. I follow the guidelines and University policy regarding the penalty for those identified as cheating or plagiarizing on exams and/or other assignments in this class (see the student handbook for maximum penalties and the definition of plagiarism). Students found to be cheating on assignments will receive an F for the course. I reserve the right to have all student written assignments submitted in an electronic format for the expressed purpose of checking assignments for plagiarism against internet sources (including pay-sites for papers) using turnitin.com. If you are in doubt as to whether or not any of your assignments for this class constitute cheating or plagiarism, please discuss this with me BEFORE turning in an assignment.

**Students with Disabilities:**

If you are seeking an academic accommodation, it is essential that you have appropriate documentation on file with the University and present that documentation to me as early as possible in the semester. If you believe that you have a disability but have no documentation on file at Susquehanna and wish to discuss what steps can be taken to determine whether an accommodation is warranted, please contact the Counseling Center for further information and assistance. Some additional information is available at <http://www.susqu.edu/counseling/disabilities/>.

**Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings:****Week 1, Day 1 (8/25)**

Introductory Session: Plato's allegory of the cave

**Unit 1: Issues in Metaphysics and Epistemology****A. The Problem of Evil****Week 1, Day 2 (8/27)**

Assignment: read Clifford's Ethics of Belief (e-res)

**Week 1 Day 3 (8/29)**

Assignment: read The Ontological Argument (DCH, pp. 158-168)

**Week 2 Day 1 (9/1)**

Assignment: read The Cosmological and Teleological Arguments (DCH, pp. 169-177)

**Week 2 Day 2 (9/3)**

Assignment: read Russell, "Why I Am Not a Christian" (e-res)

**Week 2 Day 3 (9/5)**

Assignment: read Atheism (DCH, pp. 177-180) & Blackburn, "The Problem of Evil" (e-res)

**Week 3 Day 1 (9/8)**

Assignment: study the theocidies detailed on the problem of evil handout; read Ashe, excerpt from *Days of Grace* (e-res); read Dostoevsky, "Rebellion" from *The Brothers Karamozov* (e-res)

**Week 3 Day 2 (9/10)**

Debate #1: *Can the Problem of Evil be solved?*

**B. The Problem of Skepticism**

**Week 3, Day 3 (9/12)**

Assignment: read Solomon, "Rationality, Truth, and the Problem of Knowledge" (e-res)

**Week 4 Day 1 (9/15)**

Assignment: read Descartes' Rationalism (DCH, pp. 50-64; stop after "...and befoul our lawns here on earth?")

**Week 4 Day 2 (9/17)**

Descartes' Rationalism (DCH, pp. 64-72; begin with "There is another feature...")

**Week 4 Day 3 (9/19)**

Assignment: read Empiricism (DCH, pp. 75-81) and Linden, "Sensation and Emotion" from *The Accidental Mind* (e-res)

**C. The Problem of Free Will**

**Week 5 Day 1 (9/22)**

Assignment: read Hard Determinism (DCH, pp. 213-224)

**Week 5 Day 2 (9/24)**

Assignment: read Soft Determinism/Compatibilism (pp. 224-229) & Stace, "The Problem of Free Will" (e-res)

**Week 5 Day 3 (9/26)**

Assignment: read Indeterminism & Libertarianism (pp. 229-237) & Conclusion (pp. 246-252)

**Week 6 Day 1 (9/29)**

Debate #2: *Do we have free will? Is the future pre-determined?*

Assignment: prepare for debate by forming a list of pros and cons of each of theory

**Unit 2: Issues in Ethics and Social & Political Philosophy**

**A. Ethical Theory**

**Week 6 Day 2 (10/1)**

Assignment: read Why Be Moral? (DCH, pp. 256-265)

**Week 6 Day 3 (10/3)**

Assignment: read Utilitarianism (DCH, pp. 271-280)

**Week 7 Day 1 (10/6)**

Assignment: read Kant's Deontology (DCH, pp. 280-296)

**Week 7 Day 2 (10/8)**

Assignment: read Halwani, "Homer and Aristotle" from *The Simpsons and Philosophy* (E-res)

**Week 7 Day 3 (10/10)**

Assignment: review Utilitarianism, Deontology, and Aristotelian Virtue-Ethics

**B. The Problem of Relativism**

**Week 8 Day 1 (10/15)**

Assignment: read Cultural Relativism (DCH, pp. 306-311) & the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))

**Week 8 Day 2 (10/17)**

Assignment: read Mary Midgely's "Trying Out One's New Sword" (E-res) & review cultural relativism

**Week 8 Day 3 (10/20)**

Debate #3: *Should polygamy be illegal in the US? Why or why not?*

Assignment: Read Krakauer, excerpt from *Under the Banner of Heaven* (E-res)

**C. Other Critiques of Traditional Ethical Theories**

**Week 9 Day 1 (10/22)**

Assignment: read Ethics and Deep Ecology (DCH, pp. 320-330)

**\*Week 9 Day 2 (10/24)**

In-class viewing of "Our Daily Bread"

**Week 9 Day 3 (10/27)**

Assignment: read Rachels, "Vegetarianism and the 'Other Weight Problem'" (E-res); in-class: finish "Our Daily Bread"

**Week 10 Day 1 (10/29)**

Debate #4: *Is it unethical to eat meat? Why or why not?*

Assignment: prepare for debate by forming a list of pros and cons of each perspective

**Week 10 Day 2 (10/31)**

Assignment: read Feminist Critiques of Ethics (DCH, pp. 311-319) and Jaggar, "Can Philosophy Be Feminist?" (E-res)

**D. Social and Political Philosophy**

**Week 10 Day 3 (11/3)**

Assignment: read Political Philosophy: Plato and Hobbes (DCH, pp. 333-347)

**Week 11 Day 1 (11/5)**

Assignment: read Political Philosophy: Locke and Mill (DCH, pp. 347-355 & 361-366)

**Week 11 Day 2 (11/7)**

Assignment: read about Nozick's Libertarianism (DCH, pp. 374-379) and Rawls' Liberalism (DCH, pp. 379-382)

**Week 11 Day 3 (11/10)**

Assignment: read about Marxism (DCH, pp. 366-374)

Visiting Lecturer: Dr. Charles Sackrey, Emeritus Professor of Economics

**\*Week 12 Day 1 (11/12)**

In-class viewing of "Sicko" (first half)

\*begin reading Singer e-res reading, which is longer than most readings\*

**\*Week 12 Day 2 (11/14)**

In-class viewing of "Sicko" (second half)

\*continue reading Singer e-res reading, which is longer than most readings\*

**Week 12 Day 3 (11/17)**

Assignment: finish reading Singer, excerpt from *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (e-res)

**Week 13 Day 1 (11/19)**

*Debate #5: Is luxurious living ethical? Why or not?*

**Week 13 Day 2 (11/21)**

Assignment: read Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" (e-res)

**Week 13 Day 3 (11/24)**

Assignment: review political philosophy theories; begin reading Schlosser, excerpt from *Reefer Madness* (e-res); in-class viewing of "Grass" (first part)

**Week 14 Day 1 (12/1)**

Finish viewing "Grass"; continue reading Schlosser

**Week 14 Day 2 (12/3)**

*Debate #6: Should marijuana be decriminalized in the United States?*

Assignment: finish reading Schlosser, excerpt from *Reefer Madness* (e-res) & Earlywine, excerpt from *Understanding Marijuana* (e-res); prepare for debate by forming a list of pros and cons of each perspective

**Week 14 Day 3 (12/5)**

Final Session--review for final exam

Assignment: Study beforehand; bring in a list of all of your questions