Philosophy 125: Great Philosophers
SPRING 2012

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What We are Up To

This particular session of Great Philosophers is run differently than most courses. Four philosophers, considered some of the greatest in the Western tradition, will be put on trial to see if they really do deserve the title “Great”. Specifically, we will be examining the works of Plato, Aristotle, Berkeley, and Hume.

Please note that this format requires a lot from students in terms of time commitment and workload. If you think scheduling group meetings, reading hundreds of pages of text, analyzing arguments, and working with others might too time concerning or not worthwhile for you—this might not be the course for you.

The outlines of the class will be given in the first two class periods. Although you are technically allowed several weeks to add/drop the course, we ask that you please make a decision as soon as possible, so as not to disrupt group assignments, etc.

If you do decide the join us… great! Get the books, and get to reading!

Goals for the Course

Through the trial format, you will gain expertise in:

- Reading and evaluating philosophical texts
- Discussing philosophical texts and ideas
- Formulating arguments, both on your own and in groups
- Writing concise, clear arguments
- Working with others to produce quality work in a timely manner (just like the real world...)
A Note on Group Work

A lot of the work done in this class is “group work”—assignments will have to be completed as a group, and those assignments will earn you a grade as a group as well. If group work is not to your liking, you might want to consider taking a different course, or a Great Philosophers course in another semester that does not use this format.

Why is there so much group work? Part of the answer lies in the trial format itself: it just makes sense to have teams of people discussing the works, preparing briefs, rendering judgments, etc. But part of the answer lies in the nature of group work itself. Outside of the classrooms at Wash U., you will probably never have to write down things you know in a little blue book for twenty minutes, or answer questions in a lecture. But you will (most likely) have to assign tasks, set deadlines, discuss ideas, make compromises, and otherwise work with others to create quality results. Consider group work the larger part of your “unofficial” education this semester!

If you are having issues with your group or group work at any time, you are encouraged to contact me. I would also suggest you see the handout Advice for Better Group Work.

Texts

Texts are available at the campus book store. These include:

- Plato, The Republic (translated by Bloom)
- West and West, Four Texts of Socrates (OPTIONAL)
- Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics
- Aristotle, Politics
- Berkeley, Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues (Two texts in one book)
- Bettcher, Berkeley: A Guide for the Perplexed (OPTIONAL)
- Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion
- Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding
- Coventry, Hume: A Guide for the Perplexed (OPTIONAL)

Handbooks for each trial will be made available on Telesis, and are specific to the roles played in the trial.

Class Policies

1) Students suspected of plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty or misconduct will be reported to the Dean. Sadly, I have had to do this in the past. What happens afterwards is not fun.

2) If you are part of a team and have to miss class, please inform your group members. If you email them, cc: me on the email as well.
3) If it becomes apparent that you are missing multiple classes and/or appointments for no good reason, there will be consequences, up to and including ejection from the course.

4) If you miss class or arrive late, you are still responsible for announcements and material missed.

5) Students taking to course Pass/Fail are expected to participate fully on the activities for the course. You must receive a 70 for a “pass” grade.

6) Incompletes and grade changes are awarded only under exceptional circumstances, and only if arrangements are made ahead of time.

Evaluation

Your final grade will be an average of your individual grades, which in turn depend on your role in any given trial:

• Members of the Prosecution and the Defense receive a grade for their pre-trial brief, and possibly a second grade based on quiz performance.

• The Judges receive a grade based on quiz performance, and a grade based on their final decision for a trial.

• The Expert witnesses receive one grade from the professor based on their in-class lectures, and one grade reflecting the median average of students’ performance on the quiz.

• Members of the Gallery receive a grade based on an in-class quiz, and can receive extra credit for making statements in the trial.

In addition, everyone will have to complete a final paper, due Monday, April 30th. This also counts as one grade.